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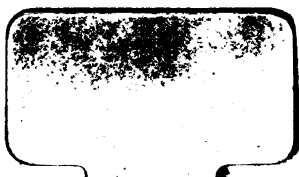
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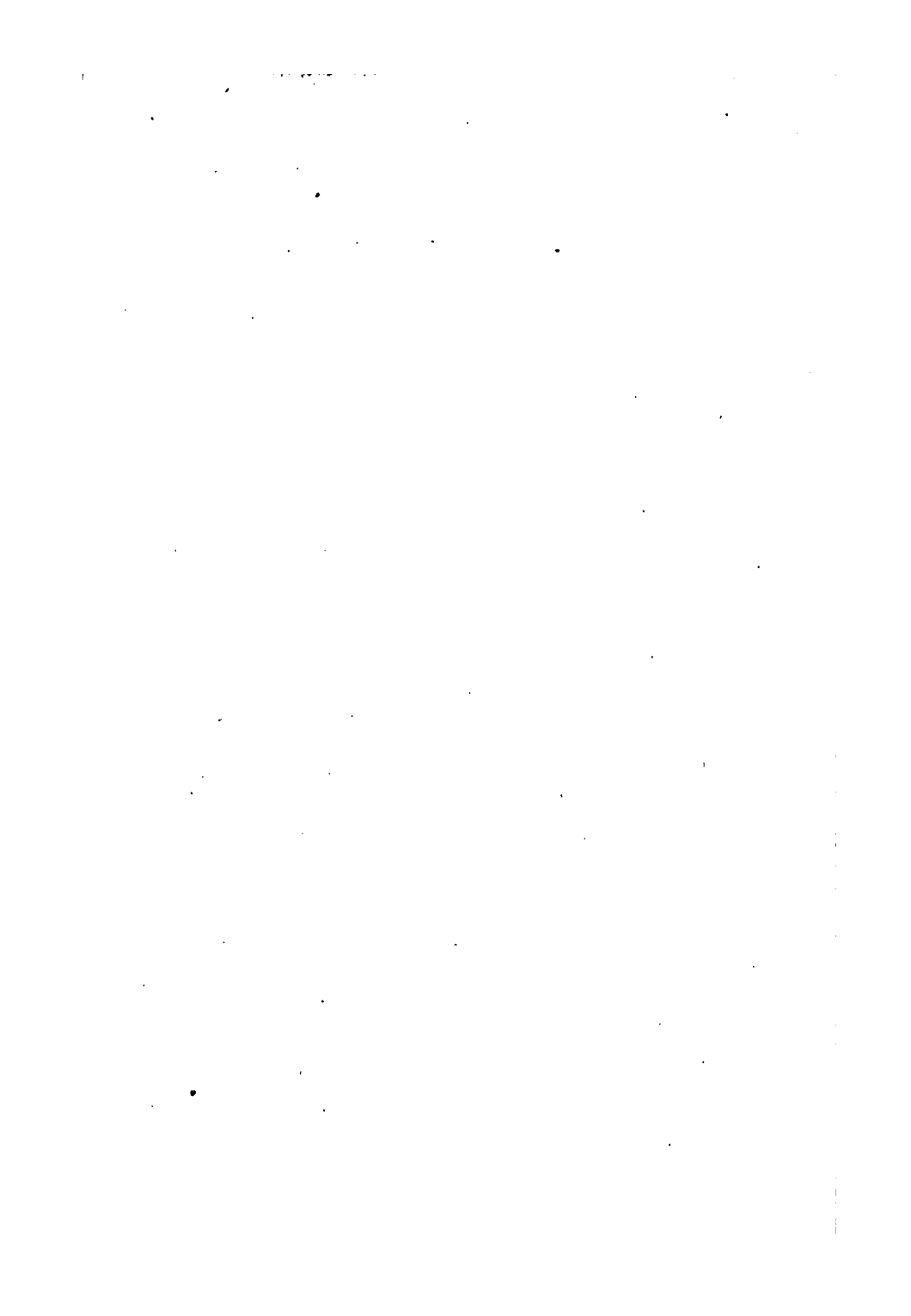
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IN THE COUNSELLOR'S HOUSE.

BY

E. MARLITT,

AUTHOR OF "THE SECOND WIFE," ETC.

FROM THE GERMAN, BY ANNIE WOOD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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IN THE COUNSELLOR'S HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.



HE slanting rays of the December sun played dimly across a large bedroom in the Mill-house, glittered for a moment with dazzling brightness on a case of surgical instruments which lay exposed to view in the embrasure of the deep stone window-sill, and then vanished through the thick, overhanging snow-clouds in the sky.

In a corner of the room, away from the

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glare of the light, stood a massive wooden bedstead, ornamented at the head and foot with paintings of common yellow roses and bright pinks, with a large feather-bed heaped high upon it, on which lay the master of the house, the miller. He had just gone through an operation for a tumour in the throat, which had many times threatened to suffocate him ; it had been a difficult and very dangerous proceeding, but the clever young man who had just lowered the blinds, and was arranging his instruments in their case at the window-sill, had a satisfied expression on his face, for the operation had been successful.

While under the influence of chloroform, the patient had raved and tried to resist the hand of the doctor, as if he were fully conscious of the pain inflicted

upon him ; but now he lay pale and exhausted upon the pillows, and very still. To speak he was forbidden ; yet a glance at the laconic silent-looking face, whose only beauty was the soft shining silver hair which hung about it, would have convinced a looker-on that the doctor's command was very unnecessary.

“Are you hopeful, Bruck ?” asked a gentleman in a low tone, as he drew near the young doctor. Up to this moment he had been standing at the foot of the bed, and his handsome face still bore marks of the emotion the sight of the operation had produced on one unaccustomed to such scenes.

The young doctor nodded.

“Everything is well as yet, and my patient's strong constitution will aid and

complete my work, I am convinced of that," he answered calmly, as he turned his eyes with a satisfied air towards the bed in the corner ; "and now I must leave off watching here ; I am obliged to go. My patient must on no account move, he must be kept very quiet—everything depends on his being still, for fear of bleeding, and——"

"You may depend upon me," interrupted the other quickly ; " I shall remain here as long as the old man is in danger, or it is necessary for him to be watched ;" adding, " Will you tell them in the villa that I shall not return to tea ?"

The colour deepened on the young doctor's cheeks, and his tone had a somewhat sad ring in it, as he replied :

" I can't go that roundabout way through

the park, for I must reach town as soon as possible."

"But you have not seen Flora to-day, and——"

"Don't you think I know that ? or that it costs me nothing to give her up?" and he drew his lips together, and hesitated, as he put his case of instruments in his pocket.

"I have many sick patients to attend to to-day," he added, after a moment, more quietly ; " Lenery's little girl is dying, will die in all probability to-night ; I can't do anything for the child, but the parents, who are worn-out with nursing and anxiety, count the moments until my visit, I know ; the poor mother won't even eat unless I make her."

He moved to the side of the bed, the invalid raised the lids of his eyes, and

looked at the doctor for a moment with an expression of warm gratitude shining over his sunken features for the unspeakable relief the absence of the tumour gave him, and feebly tried to stretch out his hand ; but the doctor held it quiet on the coverlid, as he repeated his injunctions that he must lie completely still, and try and not move at all, adding :

“The Counsellor intends staying with you, Herr Sommer, and will see that my orders are faithfully carried out.”

The old man seemed content, turned his eyes languidly towards the Counsellor, as if seeking in his face for a confirmation of the doctor's words, and receiving a friendly assuring nod in return, closed his eyes, as if he wished to sleep.

The doctor turned away from the bed,

took up his hat, shook hands with the Counsellor, and left the chamber.

Had an anxious loving wife been sitting by that bedside, she must have felt as the door closed behind the young man, a feeling of loneliness and desolation creep over her, contrasting strongly with the hope and confidence which imbued the poor woman in the town whose child was dying, when an hour later the doctor entered her room and persuaded her to eat the meal the suffering of her little one had caused her to forget.

But, by the miller's bedside no loving hand or tender woman's anxiety had a place. The old housekeeper came in quietly enough after the operation was over, and noiselessly began clearing away the disorder consequent upon the doctor's visit ; but she seemed more distressed at

the sight of a few drops of water spilled on the table-cloth than by the danger and suffering of her old master.

“Do let all that alone now, missus,” said the Counsellor in a low but very polite tone. “The movement of those things will disturb father, and the doctor ordered before all things the most perfect quiet.”

The woman did as she was bid at once, taking with her the basin and towels and the unfortunate wet table-cloth to be dried in the kitchen.

Now, all was as silent and noiseless as it is possible for a mill-house to be. From under the floor came the faint constant recurring burr and trembling of the mills, the very monotony of which was almost soothing in its effect—outside, the continual flapping of the water against the mill-

wheel, the cooing of the doves, and the rustling of the twigs as the huge branches of the chestnut trees swayed to and fro in the evening breeze, could not and did not disturb the invalid on the bed, for to him they were as natural as the air he breathed, or the regular beatings of his own heart.

What a hard unloving face it was on which that elegant man standing by the bedside was now gazing. Perhaps never before in the whole course of his life had the excessive plainness of his face, the hard coarse features, the thick under lip, looked so distinctly repulsive as just now when the sleep of exhaustion from physical and mental suffering deepened the furrows in the miller's countenance, and sharpened the stamp of his character more clearly

about the mouth. Well, the old man's life had been a rough one, at all events for a great many years. He had started on his career as a sort of miller's errand-boy, but now he was a man who had made his way in the world, and been able to coin for himself gold and position, which perhaps accounted for the Counsellor's respectful mode of speaking and calling him "father," for there was certainly no tie of relationship between them. The late banker Mangold, whose eldest daughter had married the Counsellor, had taken for a second wife the miller's only child; and this link of marriage was the only connection between the suffering old man lying on the huge painted bedstead, and his faithful watcher.

The Counsellor moved away from the

bedside and went over to one of the windows. He was a young energetic-looking man, but the silence and anxious watching in the sick-room made him feel nervous—it seemed to pain him to look at nothing but that hard unsympathizing countenance on the pillows, and the knotted clenched hand lying nerveless on the bed-clothes which had formerly cracked the whip over the heads of the mill horses with so much force and will. He gazed out of window and for a few moments idly watched the landscape stretched before him. The December sun had withdrawn its feeble rays, and a grey soft light, fast fading into the darkness of the coming night, seemed to cover the whole earth.

Just beyond the spot where it turned

the mill-wheel, the river made a sudden bend, and here, half hidden from view by the branches of the trees, stood a square building ugly in form and appearance, the hard outlines of which gloomed strangely in contrast to the graceful curves of the swaying trees in the fast approaching darkness.

It was the spinning-mill belonging to the young man standing by the window. He too was rich, employing several hundred workmen in his manufactory, and it was this property of his which had brought him into close business relations with the miller. The mill itself had been built about a hundred years before, and had certain privileges attached to it, which were in force at the present day, besides controlling so much of the river that those who

lived in the neighbourhood were inclined to grumble at its excess on this point; and not one of these rights would the miller cede so much as by one inch. At first only a tenant, he had, bit by bit, as his riches increased, succeeded in becoming not only owner of the mill and its water-rights, but of the whole surrounding land to which it belonged. He had bought the last few acres shortly before the marriage of his only child to Herr Mangold the banker. The miller regarded the possession of all this property from a purely monetary point of view; for himself he did not care to own the land, and thereby increase his importance in the social scale, but that his daughter might reign over it as mistress he did care, and for this reason he had refused to sell the handsome villa

enclosed in a noble park, which formed one portion of it.

Lately the merchant had become his tenant, and, at the time our story begins, occupied the villa with his family, and by yielding at first to the old man's weakness about the disputed water-rights, he had gradually fallen into the position of an obedient son to his somewhat surly and ill-tempered landlord.

The factory clock had just struck four, and the gas was already lighted in the offices. The air was damp and heavy, as often happens before a coming fall of snow, and the gathering darkness intensified the brightness of the light shining from the windows of the far-distant spinning-mill, as well as those which were nearer at hand. The pigeons, after huddling close

together for awhile under the shelter of the tall trees, suddenly flew away from off the branches, and hurried to roost in the warm dry cover of the dove-cot. The merchant felt chilly standing at the window, and turned towards the interior of the room. As his eye glanced over the apartment it struck him what a very pleasant homely-looking place it was with its well-worn carpet, discoloured prints on the walls, and wide old-fashioned sofa inviting one to lounge in comfortable ease on its soft pillows. The old servant brought in some fresh logs of wood, and replenished the dying fire in the open stove, just as the last glimmer of daylight was fading through the shining glass of the communicating door of the adjoining small room. Behind this door stood the iron safe in which the

miller kept his money and papers of value.

About an hour before the operation was to be performed the sick man had made his will ; and as the young doctor and the merchant entered the house, they had met the lawyers and witnesses to the signature, on the door-step about to depart. However cool and collected the outer mien of the miller had been, he must inwardly have felt strangely nervous and upset, for in putting away the documents he had just signed, his hand shook visibly, and one of the papers remained behind on the table. He did not notice this unwonted proof of oversight on his own part till after the doctor and his friend had entered the room, and then, as he saw it lying on the table, he begged the merchant to lock it up in

the safe in the adjoining cabinet. On the other side of this small room there was an outer door which led into the large entrance hall, where numbers of the people belonging to the mill hung about on business.

The merchant stood warming his half frozen fingers by the stove, when his eye wandered carelessly towards the inner little room. He started, and for a moment wondered if he were dreaming, for he saw that the door of the iron safe stood open. Ah ! if the miller had noticed it, what a state of anxiety he would be in about his beloved gold ! "No one can have entered the room," the merchant said to himself as he walked into the little sanctum, "for I should have heard the slightest footfall ; besides, the opening of the outer door could not have passed unnoticed by me,"

he added, as a kind of comfort to his own anxiety; "however, I must see if everything is all right."

So saying, he drew back the safe-door as gently as possible, and passed in. It appeared all right, the heavy money-bags of the formerly poor errand-boy stood by the side of the piles of paper arranged in order, and many shining gold pieces were there also. The merchant's dazzled gaze wandered in search of the paper he had hastily pushed into one of the pigeon-holes at the miller's request; it was a valuable document, being the inventory of the whole property. He was laying it carefully on the top of a packet of similar documents, when he accidentally knocked over one of the small piles of gold pieces which rolled down on to the uncarpeted

floor with a clanging clanking sound that made him shudder. He had unwittingly touched gold belonging to another, and the blood flew into his face with an undefined sense of shame and vexation at his awkwardness as he stooped to pick up the scattered pieces. He had barely reached one, when a large heavy body fell on him from behind, and strong bony fingers grasped his throat.

"Damn you, I am not dead yet!" hissed the miller in his ear, in a strangely choked voice, as he tried to drag him out of the cabinet.

A tussle ensued, in which the young man had to call up all his strength and elasticity of movement to shake himself free from the murderous clutch of the old man on his throat. To seize the miller with both hands and violently wrench his fingers

from their hold on his neck was the work of a moment; but it required one or two more before he could recover breath enough to gasp,

“Are you mad, Pater? How could you insult me with——” but he broke off as the sick man tottered against the wall, and the white bands round his throat and chin became suddenly scarlet in hue, and red drops of blood trickled fast down the front of his night-shirt.

The merchant shuddered, and his face paled to an ashen-grey as he saw this dangerous sign. This, then, was the bleeding that the doctor had said must by all means be avoided. “Am I in fault?” he asked himself rapidly; “am I to blame?”

“No, no,” he cried aloud in answer to this unexpressed thought as he sprang for-

ward, and gently putting his arms round the miller's form, would have carried him back to his bed ; but the obstinate old man repulsed him, and pointing silently to the fallen Louis d'or, intimated his intention of remaining where he was till they were all safe in their place. To the danger he ran of losing his life by this proceeding, he either paid no heed, or forgot it in his anxiety over his money ; and it was not till the merchant had picked up each piece, laid it on the shelf, and locking the safe, placed the key in his hand, that the miller with feeble tottering steps allowed himself to be led back to his room, and sank exhausted and faint on his bed. The moment the merchant had placed the invalid's head on the pillows, he called as loud as he could for the old housekeeper and the servants.

When they came in, the miller's eyes were fixed in a glassy frightened gaze on the broad purple mark the flowing blood had already made on the linen sheets and pillow-case.

A messenger was despatched with all haste to the town to fetch back Dr. Bruck, while the housekeeper brought water and fresh linen to try and stop the bleeding. It was all in vain. The merchant pressed towel after towel on the wounded place, but the blood could not be suppressed. There was no doubt about it, one of the arteries must have given way. And how did that happen? Had the half-delirious old man done it himself, or—and the merchant's heart gave a great start,—had he done it when he was endeavouring to free himself from the grasp of his angry assailant!

“How was it possible for me to tell in such a moment of agony, when he was holding my throat in a vice, whether I seized his shoulder, or neck, or arm, to shake off his hold on me?” he thought, as he watched the extreme pallor of the dying man’s face. “Perhaps the sudden spring out of bed did it—Bruck told him everything depended on his lying still and not moving. No, no, my conscience is clear on this point, it was not my fault, and I cannot, need not, blame myself; it is his own doing entirely. I went to the safe merely to see if all was right; how could he dare mistrust me, and suspect me of any such base design as he seems to have harboured concerning me?” And the feelings of anxiety and fright about the invalid in which the merchant had hitherto indulged, now changed to one of anger at

the insult he had received. This was all he had got in return for his kindness—a kindness he would have offered to any one who was weak and helpless, it is true, for his nature was such that he could never refuse to forget himself for another's good and well-being. But if he had returned home, enjoyed the game of whist in his elegant drawing-room, which he had looked forward to all day, this unfortunate circumstance would not have happened. Instead of being here now trying to staunch the fast-flowing life-blood, he might have been taking a comfortable smoke! It must have been his evil genius which prompted him to take up this position of watcher by the old man's bedside; and this was the awkward predicament in which it had placed him; and as these

thoughts occupied his head, his hands grew more and more wet with the stream that still continued to ooze from the lately operated-on throat. How slowly the moments went by ! The invalid seemed fully aware of his danger, and although he could not speak, his eyes wandered anxiously towards the door each time a footfall was heard outside, as if he hoped for a reprieve from approaching death by the appearance of the doctor, while the merchant watched with painful anxiety the changes in the sick man's face, which betokened, even to an inexperienced eye, that his last hour was at hand.

The housekeeper brought in the lamp, then hastened out of the room again to listen for the doctor's voice ; but she heard nothing, and returning to the bedside she

too stood watching in silence the pale exhausted face, rendered almost ghastly by the flickering light of the lamp. A few minutes later the miller's eyes closed, and the key he had held firmly in his hand slipped from his grasp and fell on the sheet, for he had fainted from loss of blood. Unconsciously the merchant stretched out his fingers to move the key away, but the moment he touched the cold steel, a shudder ran through his whole frame as the thought struck him, how would the world regard the late unfortunate encounter in the inner cabinet? He knew that it would be whispered all over town the next morning that the operation had been successful, but that the shock of seeing the merchant at his strong chest had brought on the bleeding, from which the miller did not recover; and that

in itself would be a slur on his honour, for how was he to defend himself and prove the innocence of an action that would look so black in the eyes of others?—the very thought that even only one slanderous tongue might remark, “Why should Herr Römer go to the strong safe of the miller at all?” made his blood boil. He had enemies he knew who would be very glad to believe him capable of such a mean act. He smiled bitterly to himself as he remembered that his hitherto unblemished character and high repute for unswerving honour would not be sufficient to exonerate him from the foul suspicion which would follow the knowledge of his presence in the private sanctum at that critical time. The perspiration rolled from his forehead with the intensity of his anguish as he stooped over

the dying man, and looked earnestly at him. If the miller did not recover strength enough to relate the affair before his death, then the event would be buried with him; for, thought the merchant to himself, with a changed expression as he pressed his lips together, "I will never mention it to a human being."

Presently the watch-dog barked suddenly, and hasty steps traversed the yard and mounted the staircase. For a moment Doctor Bruck stood motionless on the threshold of the door, as if turned into stone, then silently laying his hat on the table, he advanced to the bedside of the dying man. What a painful silence reigned in the room in spite of this fresh arrival!

"He will come to again, won't he, Herr

Doctor ?” asked the housekeeper, in an awed whisper.

“Hardly,” replied the doctor looking up from a grave examination of the waxen face on the pillows, his own cheeks white as the linen on the bed. “Control yourself,” he added sternly, as Susanne seemed inclined to break into a flood of weeping, “and tell me why my patient left his bed ?” he added, as he pointed to the drops of blood on the floor.

“That must come from these soaked towels,” the merchant explained in a quiet firm voice, though his face was pale to the lips.

“Why, of course he has not stirred from his bed, doctor ; how could he, poor man ? and you told him yourself not to move,” replied Susanne.

Doctor Bruck shook his head.

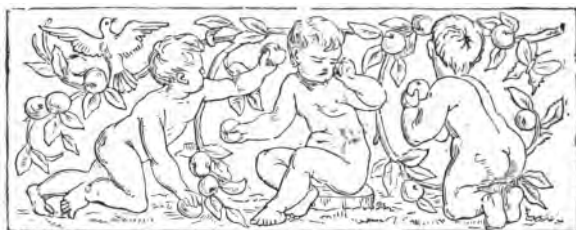
“The bleeding must have been caused by some movement—he must have made some violent effort to—”

“Not that I am aware of, I assure you,” replied the merchant, meeting the inquiring earnest look of the doctor’s eyes with a tolerably steady gaze. “Besides, what do you mean by staring at me like that? Do you think I would conceal it from you if your patient had sprang out of bed in some delirious fancy?”

He was determined to hold fast to the vow he had just made of keeping his own counsel respecting the episode in the inner room. To guard his own honour he would tell the boldest falsehood, though his throat felt as if grasped in a vice as he uttered the last words.

The young doctor turned silently away. Once for a moment the dying miller raised his eyelids and gazed vacantly before him, and made a slight effort to speak, but the sound from his lips was only a faint murmur that had no meaning.

A few hours later, Herr Römer the merchant left the Mill-house, for all was over—the miller was dead. Broad strips of paper were stretched over the bedroom and adjoining cabinet; for as soon as the miller had breathed his last, the merchant had taken care to have everything sealed up in safety before his eyes.



CHAPTER II.



LOWLY he walked through the park towards home. The gleam of the lights from the Mill-house windows vanished behind him as he went forth into the darkness, alone with his thoughts. The wind swept around him sharp and piercing, cold snow-flakes rested on his cheeks, but it was neither the wind nor the snow which caused him to shiver as if with cold, but rather the bitterness of his own reflections, and the

remembrance of the last few hours' excitement. Early in the afternoon, as a happy careless man, he had passed over the same path he was now treading, and a few hours later he seemed as if he was burdened with the consciousness of being the innocent cause of a fellow-creature's death ; he who would not willingly have harmed or hurt the lowest animal on the earth. He knew that the only reproach he deserved was that of silence, but by being silent he injured no one—not one individual would suffer, and—bah ! he would reflect about the affair no longer—he was weary of it. Before him streamed the bright lights of the windows and doors of the lower story of his home ; he was nearing the Villa, walking up the broad avenue of linden trees which led to the house, and he knew that once inside

that pleasant shelter, life had nothing but brightness to offer him. He breathed a sigh of relief as he reached the door, and turned his gloomy thoughts away from the mill and its late occupant, as he shook the loose snow from his dripping over-coat. In the drawing-room of the handsome Villa, the widow of the late President Urach had gathered around her this same evening a large party of friends.

He paused a moment on the verandah, and peered through the brilliantly illumined windows at the rooms inside. Magnificent mirrors, costly velvet hangings, dazzling candelabras, rich furniture, and priceless pictures on the walls met his gaze on every side, and made the darkness of the night outside more intense in contrast to the warmth and comfort within. A

gust of wind came sweeping up the avenue and dashed against the window, but, strong as it was, it could not shake the firm secure sashes of the windows, or even cause the light gossamer lace of the curtains to tremble as they hung.

With a kind of half-wondering astonishment the merchant watched the company assembled in these rooms. He was not thinking of the dark or golden hair of the women, of maiden's soft eyes and blushing cheek, or of the head-dresses of the dowagers and chaperones, but of the names many of those present had borne for generations. Officers of high rank, members of the court, ministers, and heads of noble families were sitting at the whist-tables or lounging in comfortable easy-chairs by the warmth of the stove. Even the

noble old Dr. von Bär, the President of the Medical Council, was there, playing a rubber of whist with the wife of a duke, the head of one of the oldest ducal houses of the land. And all these people were in *his* house, in the house of the honourable merchant prince, Counsellor Römer ; the sparkling wine in the glasses came from his cellar ; the luscious red strawberries, handed round by the liveried servants on crystal dishes, had been bought with his money. And the grand old lady who did the honours of his house with a queenly grace and dignity becoming her silver hair, was the grandmother of his late wife, for Herr Römer the merchant prince was a widower.

He turned to the west side of the house, where only two windows reflected the light from within on the outer darkness, from

one of which the hanging red curtains cast a rosy glow over the marble nymph at the fountain near by. The merchant entered the hall, and giving his coat and hat to one of the footmen loitering about, he opened the door of the room with the red curtains. The entire apartment was furnished with the same shade of colour as the curtains; walls, chairs, sofas, table-cloth, carpet, were all of a red hue. Beneath the lamp, in the centre of the room, stood a rare Japanese table of ebony and gold inlaid with arabesque designs—a writing-table in the fullest sense of the term. On it were scattered books, paper, writing materials, and a thick manuscript, on the right side of which, on a small silver salver, stood an elegant spiral glass half-filled with a dark rich wine. No flowers orna-

mented the room, nor did any bird-cage hang near the window. Life-sized busts in black marble stood on pedestals of the same material in the four corners, each one more severe and hard in mien than the other, and one entire side of the apartment was occupied by a bookcase, harmonizing in colour and material with the Japanese table, on the shelves of which beautifully bound books and folios of costly leather gave ample proof of the literary tastes of the owner of this room.

When the merchant opened the door, a lady who was pacing the floor with impatient but monotonous regularity, stood still. At a first glance fancy suggested that she must have just come in from under the falling snow, she looked so white and pale in the midst of that rosy sur-

rounding. The graceful folds of her long cachemere dress lightly fastened round her slender waist, might be the result of a desire for ease and comfort, or the studied arrangement of a finished mistress of the art of dressing; whichever it was, the form it enveloped had a noble bearing and a dove-like charm that would have suited Iphigenia. Although not in the bloom of early youth, the lady was very beautiful, with a soft clear profile, mobile features, and supple rounded figure. Her very fair hair was cut short and curled in close waves round her ears and throat. She was Flora Mangold, and twin-sister to the merchant's late wife. On the appearance of her brother-in-law she started, folded her arms on her bosom, and looked anxiously in his face.

"Why are you not in there, Flora?" he asked, pointing in the direction of the drawing-room with his thumb.

"How could you expect me to be there? I am not likely to join grandmamma's tea-table, and knit stockings and bands for old women and children," she answered angrily.

"But the gentlemen, Flora——"

"Why, they love scandal and tea as well as women, in spite of their orders and epaulettes."

Herr Römer smiled.

"You have the blues, my dear girl," he said as he flung his tall form on one of the easy-chairs.

But she shook her head and threw it back with a proud gesture, clasping her hands tightly on her bosom as, after a

momentary hesitation, she said breathlessly,—

“Moriz, tell me the truth, did the miller die under Dr. Bruck’s operating knife?”

He started.

“What an idea! You women are always for making things blacker——”

“Make an exception of me here,” she interrupted, with again that proud movement of her head.

“Certainly, of course, but with all respect due to your brains and general good sense, are you more lenient than the others?” he asked as he rose and began pacing the room. This unexpected position of affairs was not to his liking. “Die under Bruck’s operating knife!” he repeated in a choked voice. “I tell you that the operation took place about two o’clock,

and the man died a couple of hours after. Besides, I can't understand how *you* can bring yourself to express such a hard thought, Flora, let alone saying it in that hard unsympathizing manner."

"I am just the one to say it," she replied, stamping her foot on the soft thick carpet. "I who can't bear secretiveness of any kind, you know that. I am too proud, and too impatient and outspoken to know of another's faults and conceal them, be that other who he may! But don't imagine I don't suffer, for I do. It's as if a knife had been driven through my heart. You say I am unsympathizing. In my opinion, to sympathize with ignorance and want of knowledge in a man's profession is simply absurd and impossible. And you know quite as well as I do, Moriz, that Dr.

Bruck's reputation as a clever physician has considerably suffered through his failing to cure Countess Wallendorf."

"But the good woman would not give up her fondness for savoury pasties and champagne."

"That's what the doctor says. Her relatives are pleased to differ with him." Then pressing her hands to her brow as if her head ached, she added, "Do you know, Moriz, that when the sad news reached us here that the miller was dead, I rushed out into the open air to breathe, I felt so overcome? All the neighbourhood knew the old man, and every one was interested in the success of the operation. And if, as you say, he did not sink at the moment under Dr. Bruck's operating knife, people will justly remark that with

his strong constitution he might have lived on much longer if it had not been done. You can't deny that you had the same conviction. You should see how white you are from inward emotion."

The door opened, and the mistress of the house appeared on the threshold. In spite of her seventy years she was a wonderfully young-looking grandmamma still. Nothing about her betokened her age, she did not even wear the full loose cape that ladies of advanced age generally adopt, but her shoulders were covered with a lace fichu folded across her bosom, and fastened at the waist, and over a silver-grey silk dress, which was beautifully made, a black Spanish lace polonaise fell in rich folds to match the fichu. Her hair, which was so little grey that its golden

colour was still visible, was dressed in puffs above her forehead, and her head was ornamented with a soft tulle veil, the ends of which were fastened under her chin to hide the throat and ears.

She was not alone. With her came a rather undersized and excessively thin girl. She was not exactly out of proportion, but the painful absence of roundness in her form suggested there was something amiss in her figure, and that she was far younger than her fully developed face of four-and-twenty betokened. The three women bore a strong family likeness to each other, so marked in each feature that a mere casual observer would have guessed the relationship at a first glance—only the youngest had a broader and more determined chin, and her profile was sharper and more

defined. Her complexion, moreover, was unhealthy, and her lips had scarcely a tinge of colour. Her fair hair was ornamented with bright-coloured velvet, and her evening dress was elegant and costly ; but at her side, where ladies usually carry some dainty device for holding their handkerchief, this young maiden had placed a small willow basket softly lined with blue satin, in which sat a little canary bird.

“Henriette, I won’t have it,” cried Flora angrily, as the songster left its nest and flew straight as an arrow over her head. “I will not allow it, indeed—you ought to leave your menagerie outside.”

“But Flora, my pet, Hans has neither elephant’s feet nor horns growing on his head, he won’t hurt you,” replied the little lady patiently. “Come here, Hans, come,”

she added coaxingly to the bird, which had perched on an ornament on the ceiling, and in answer to her call flew back and settled on her outstretched forefinger.

Flora shrugged her shoulders.

“ I don’t understand you, grandmamma,” she said sharply. “ How can you tolerate such foolish childishness in Henriette? The next thing she will do will be to bring all the doves and rooks into the drawing-room.”

“ Ah, yes — and why not, Flora ?” the girl answered laughingly, showing her small white teeth. “ Our friends have to tolerate you very often with a pen behind your ear and no end of learned——”

“ Henriette !” exclaimed the old lady in a reproving tone.

Every movement of hers was queenly in

grace and dignity, and as she laid her hand on the merchant's arm and said, "We have just heard that at last you have returned home, Moriz," there was a very winsome charm about her manner that was not to be easily resisted. "Shall we have to wait for your presence amongst us much longer?" she asked in her still musical soft voice.

Ten minutes ago the merchant had decided on getting into his dress-coat as quickly as possible and joining his guests ; but now he said hesitatingly and in an under tone—

"Dearest grandmamma, you must kindly excuse me for to-night. The affair at the mill——"

"Yes, that is sad enough, very sad. But I don't see why *we* need grieve over

it. I really cannot understand how it is possible for me to excuse your non-appearance amongst our guests."

"Surely our friends cannot be so obtuse as not to be able to understand that Kathe's grandfather is dead," remarked Henriette over her shoulder, as she carelessly turned the pages of a book in her hand.

"I wish, Henriette, that you would keep your impertinent observations to yourself," replied her grandmamma. "You really ought not to have such very bright ribbons in your hair. Kathe is your step-sister, but neither Moriz nor I consider the connection with the miller close enough to be acknowledged publicly, however much we may grieve over his death. And besides," she added firmly, "the less said about

this affair the better, for Dr. Bruck's sake.

“Good heavens, how unjust you all are to the doctor!” exclaimed the Counsellor hotly. “He is not to blame in this matter at all, he did all in his power, brought all his surgical skill——”

“On *that* point, dear Moriz, you should hear the opinion of my old friend Dr. von Bär,” interrupted the old lady, tapping him lightly on the shoulder and nodding significantly towards Flora who had walked over to the writing-table.

“Oh, you need not mind me, grand-mamma! Do you think I am so blind and deaf as not to see and hear which side Bär takes?” cried the beautiful girl bitterly while her lips trembled nervously. “Besides Dr. Bruck has condemned himself, inas-

much as he has not ventured to come into my presence this evening."

Henriette had been standing up to this moment with her back towards the others. Now she turned suddenly round and faced them, her usually pale cheeks glowing scarlet for one moment but whiter than ever the next, as she fixed her large flaming eyes on her sister with a strangely mixed expression of shy terror and hate burning in them.

"Well! he will be able to refute your suspicions, for he will be here presently, Flora," observed the Counsellor, greatly relieved. "He will explain to you how terribly busy he has been all day. You know that he has several patients dangerously ill in town, besides that poor little girl Lenery, who is dying now."

The young lady uttered a mocking, bitter laugh.

“Dying, you say? Really, Moriz? Dr. von Bär told me only to-day that he saw the child yesterday and thought the accident a very slight one; he feared, however, that Bruck’s course of treatment was hardly wise; and you know Dr. von Bär is an authority.”

“An authority full of bitter jealousy,” said Henriette slowly with her vibrating voice. Then going suddenly close to her brother-in-law, and laying her thin hand on his arm, she added: “Give up trying to convince Flora. You see how determined she is to prove her lover in fault.”

“I? You unkind girl! I would give half my fortune if I could feel now the proud confidence in Dr. Bruck’s skill I did

when first we were engaged," cried Flora passionately. "But since Countess Walendorf's death, I have borne in silence the terrible agony of doubt and suspicion — now I need doubt no longer—I am convinced. I am not one of those women who love blindly and never ask themselves if the beloved one is worth sacrificing oneself for. I am ambitious, very ambitious, that you all know, and without this quality I should just be like the rest of my sex. God forbid! How any clever aspiring woman can be content to go through life by the side of an obscure and unknown husband is a mystery to me, I cannot understand it; if I had it to bear I should blush each time I looked my fellow-beings in the face."

"Oh, no; you think you would be so

bashful ? Ah ! ha ! It would require more courage than standing before an assembly of forward students, and reading a paper on metaphysics or some such subject," remarked Henriette in a mocking tone.

Flora gave her sister a scornful glance as she replied :

"Such a little viper as you one must not mind. What do you know of the ideal ?" she asked, shrugging her shoulders. "But you are right in thinking that I would rather find my place at the lecturing desk of a college than by the side of a man who made a failure of his profession—such a mortification I could not endure."

"That is your own affair entirely, child," said her grandmother wearily, as the merchant moved uneasily up and down

the room. "You must please to remember that no one either urged or obliged you to engage yourself to this man."

"I know that, grandmamma. I know, too, that you would far rather have seen me married to the bankrupt lord chamberlain von Stellon; and I think you also know that I will never allow myself to be influenced by any human being regarding what I think right for me to do."

"And no one will try, my dear," answered her grandmother with marked coldness. "There is only one thing I wish you to remember, and that is that I shall not spare you if you decide on making this affair public. You know me well, and that, I will bear anything rather than be exposed to a family scandal or a slur on our name. I live amongst you all, and I

am at the head of this house, and for this very reason I will not have people whispering and talking about us, so I hope and trust, my dear, you will not fail in your respect to me."

The merchant suddenly ceased his restless march up and down the room and stood still by the window, drawing aside the curtain to look out into the night. The wind had risen considerably, and was swaying the young trees around the lawn till they were nearly snapped asunder, and the snow-flakes rushing through the air, dyed blood-colour from the red glimmer of the lamp shining on them, harmonized well with the racking thoughts tearing through his aching head. At first he had been strongly tempted to tell Flora the whole truth about the affair, but now he

knew that he dared not utter a syllable, simply because the noble old lady would leave his house directly his confession was made, rather than be subjected to the whispering and comments of the neighbourhood which would inevitably follow ; for he was obliged to acknowledge to himself that the beautiful ambitious girl would tell the whole story rather than allow it to be imagined *she* could care for a man whose professional skill was open to doubt.

Meanwhile Henriette drew forward, her slight misshapen figure as erect as possible, her eyes flashing with scorn and passion as she said, looking straight at her grandmother—

“ So it’s only to avoid people’s tongues that you are anxious my sister should come

blameless out of this affair? It will be well for her if she does. You will forgive her if she masks her faithlessness with a worldly motive; you have no need to be so afraid of discovery, grandmamma. One has only to live in the world as we do, to know that society has so many faults, it is like rare and curious old china, the more it is cracked and cemented the more valuable it becomes."

"You had better go to your room for the rest of the evening, Henriette," replied her grandmother in a grave warning voice. "I will not allow you to return to the drawing-room while you are in this bitter and impertinent temper."

"Very well, grandmamma! Come, Hans, we will go with pleasure," she answered, laughing and rubbing her cheek against

the bird's downy plumage ; "you too dislike the old ladies belonging to the court, and the great medical authority Dr. von Bär, I know you hate him and peck his fingers whenever he offers you sugar, you dear brave little darling ! Good-night, grandmamma ; good-night, Moriz !" adding, as she suddenly paused ere reaching the door, "It is to be hoped that Flora will bethink her to follow the path that dear papa, had he been alive, would have sternly insisted on. With all her present boast of doing as she likes, she would not have dared to utter such a sentiment in his lifetime. *He* would never have encouraged her to break her word to an honourable man."

Sadly shaking her head she left the room, but had hardly passed the threshold

when the hot tears, which she had scarcely been able to keep back while she spoke, rolled quickly down her cheeks.

"What a blessing she has gone!" said Flora. "It really requires all one's forbearance not to lose patience with her."

"I never forget that she is an invalid," remarked the elder lady dryly.

"And to a certain extent she is right in what she says, Flora," the merchant ventured to observe.

"You may think as you please, Moriz," replied the young lady coldly. "All I beg of you is not to meddle with me, and thus make matters harder for me to bear. As I said before, I don't wish for any advice; I mean to act as I think best in this affair. You and grandmamma may be quite at ease about me; I punish myself

in being hard—but I have one silent ally, and that is—time.”

She lifted the spiral glass off the table and raised it to her lips, drinking part of the rich wine it contained, while her grandmother without a word more slowly left the room.

“A propos, Moriz,” said the elder lady, appearing in the room again, “what becomes of Kathe?”

“We must wait for the reading of the will, to know exactly,” replied her son-in-law, in a more cheerful tone than he had yet spoken. “I have no idea how the miller has arranged matters. Kathe is his sole heiress by law, but if he has made her so in his will remains to be seen. He always resented her being alive at all, because her mother died at her birth. In any case

she will have to come here for a little while."

"There you are mistaken, the girl won't come ; she is as fond of her old governess now as she was in papa's time," said Flora. "You should only read her letters."

"Well, perhaps it is better that she remain where she is," observed the elder lady pleasantly. "To be honest I am not so anxious to have her under my care. I never could take to her, not because of your father's second wife, Flora, *that* I have never allowed, but she was always wandering about the mill, and getting her hair and clothes covered with flour, and was ever a wilful little creature."

"Yes, a perverse little rebel belonging to the people, and yet—papa's darling," said Flora with a sarcastic smile.

“ Very likely, my dear, because she was the youngest,” remarked her grandmother, who never would allow that any one belonging to her family was neglected. “ He petted you all in turn. Do you mean to come, Moriz ?”

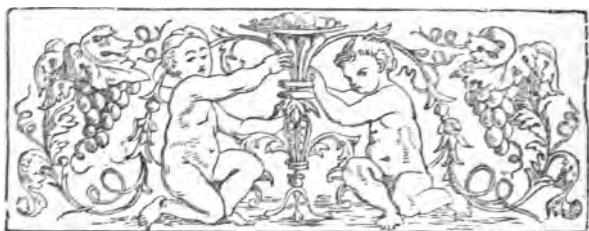
“ Yes,” he said hastily as he left the room with the elderly lady.

As soon as she was alone Flora rang the bell, and when the lady's-maid appeared in answer to the summons, said ; “ I think I will go at once to my bedroom and work there ! Just carry this inkstand and paper with you, and lay them on the table ; I will see no one else this evening.”

The red reflection on the snow vanished, but the white lights from the drawing-room streamed out into the avenue till

long after midnight. When the merchant appeared amongst his guests he was greeted with such warmth and delight by every one present, and so much regret was expressed at his unavoidable absence in the early part of the evening, that his oppressed heart grew light, and as he looked first at one and then at the other, and met eyes beaming with confidence and regard, he began to feel at ease with his conscience and to let the scruples of the last few hours fade into oblivion. He sat at the whist-table and played with his usual skill, but he did not yet venture to comfort himself with the assurance that his silence had done no harm. By holding his tongue he had separated two people who had promised to become one over the betrothal ring—

but bah! Flora was such an odd girl. Bruck would be sure to gain distinction yet, and then perhaps Flora would change her mind again. He lifted a glass of costly wine to his lips, and therewith his last scruple vanished.



CHAPTER III.



S was expected, the miller had left all his property and fortune to his orphan grandchild Kathe Mangold, appointing Counsellor Römer, who had been for some years the girl's guardian, as his sole executor. The Counsellor could hardly suppress a start of surprise when the will was read, at the extreme confidence the old man placed in him, by giving him almost unlimited power over his ward's fortune. He

could scarcely believe it possible, when he remembered that, an hour after signing this testament, the miller had accused him of trying to rob his coffers, and by his own rash suspicion turned the doubt which had necessitated the making a will into a certainty. The will declared that, in the event of the operation on his throat proving fatal, he wished all the landed property he possessed to be sold, with the exception of the flour-mill and house attached. The reason for this exception was in the fact that it was the mill which had made his fortune, and even if his grandchild was as "proud and haughty as her step-sister," she need not be ashamed of owning such a place, when the time arrived for her to marry. The estate was to be divided into various portions, and sold to different

buyers. Forest, fields, and even the meadow land, and orchard, were each to be purchased by a different person. As regarded the Villa and Park, the merchant was to have the refusal of that portion of the property—if he felt so inclined, reserving it as his own possession with the additional sum of five thousand thalers free of tax. This five thousand thalers was bequeathed to the merchant, not so much as compensation for the trouble he might have with the management of the vast property, but as a mark of the testator's gratitude for his kindly friendliness, and for being more like a relative to the lonely old man than the "other inmates of the Villa." The proceeds of the sale of the estate were to be invested out in such manner as Kathe's guardian thought

best, since the testator would lay no restrictions on a man whose incorruptible honour he had never known to be at fault.

Kathe Mangold had not seen her home for six years. When her father was dying he extracted a promise from her future guardian, that she should go and live with the governess who had brought her up, and taken the place of the mother the child had lost at her birth. This lady was about to marry and settle in Dresden, and Kathe's papa, the banker Mangold, knew that his little pet daughter would be much happier if he left her under the care of her old governess, than if she remained at home with her grown-up step-sisters. So little Kathe went to live in Dresden, and as the years passed on she was never

invited to pay a visit to her old grandfather at the mill, who could never forget that the birth of this child caused the death of his only daughter, the only human thing he had ever loved. Now the old man was dead, the time had arrived for Kathe to return to her home. In answer to her guardian's letter announcing the contents of the will, the girl's only request had been that the large corner room in the Mill-house with the small cabinet adjoining might be left exactly as it had been in her grandfather's life-time. Which request had of course been attended to.

It was the middle of March, and the snow was not all melted away, when a young lady left the narrow streets of the town, and turned up the broad road leading to the Castle mill. The melting snow had

made the roads very dirty, the wheels of the carts heavily-laden with flour-bags had left deep ruts all along the route ; but the pretty feet shod in well-made boots did not seem to take much heed about the dirty state of the footpaths. Holding up her black silk dress as far as her slight well-rounded ankle, so as to avoid sprinkling it with mud, the girl trotted briskly along, the colour deepening in her cheeks from the unwonted quickness of her movements. A loose black velvet jacket lined with fur could not hide the graceful outline and full development of her bust and figure, and a small hat of marten fur slightly drawn off the forehead, showed off to perfection the glossy shimmer of her light brown hair. The face was by no means classical in beauty, the nose was too short, the mouth too

large, the dimpled chin a thought too firmly set, the eyebrows not sufficiently arched, to form a perfectly beautiful face ; but the delicate oval of the cheeks, the rich full lips, the white lids of the sparkling eyes fringed with dark lashes, the fresh glow of the complexion, the sweet innocence of her expression, fully atoned for any want in regular outline of feature, and made Kathe Mangold's bright young face a very attractive object to gaze upon.

The young lady entered the court-yard of the Castle mill, and looked around her.

The sun was shining brightly on the grand old walls of the Mill-house, making the massive stones of which they were built appear greyer and older than they were in reality. The last portion of snow

had slipped from the roof during the night, leaving the grey slates clean and dazzling in the noonday sun ; the resin oozing from the buds was glittering like diamonds on the moving branches of the chestnut trees, and a number of pigeons were cooing somewhere near. Just in front of her, on the door-step of the workmen's eating-room, sat a man covered with white flour devouring huge mouthfuls of bread and cheese.

At the stranger's approach the dogs in the court-yard set up a loud barking, but, not a whit frightened, the young lady called out in a coaxing tone—

“ Be quiet, Mohr! Wachter!” At the sound of her voice the animals only barked the louder, and tried hard to break away from their chains.

"What do you want?" asked the man slowly, and with difficulty rising from the door-step.

The girl smiled gaily as she replied—

"I want nothing but to say how do you do, Franz. Where's your wife?"

"Surely it can't be our young lady?" said the man, flinging down his knife and bread, as a broad smile lit up his face, and he gazed into the new-comer's countenance with an expression of astonishment blended with unfeigned delight that made the laughing girl blush with pleasure.

In the years gone by, when Kathe was a little girl, she had been called by the hands at the mill the "mill mouse," from her love of creeping about the granaries and work-rooms whenever the foreman of the works

would allow her to follow him in the discharge of his duties.

“Very curious,” remarked the man half to himself, who was no taller than the girl before him. “It’s very curious ; the dimples in the cheeks and the eyes are the same, but how tall she is ! And now she’s mistress here,” he added as he glanced somewhat shyly at the slight girlish figure before him. “She takes after her grandmother—be quiet there, you beasts !” he thundered, holding up his fist at the dogs, who were barking as if they were mad with joy. “The creatures remember you, I do believe, my honoured young lady——”

“Better than you do, Franz, the dear fellows !” she answered, interrupting him, and going towards the animals she began

caressing them with her hand. "But why do you address me as 'honoured,' Franz? I have not become noble in Dresden, I can assure you."

"But the ladies at the Villa like to be addressed in that manner," he remarked in answer, looking inquiringly at her.

'Do they?'

"Yes, and you, miss, are a great deal higher than they are. So young and already so rich, so enormously rich! The mill there, the best in all the land. Zounds, that's enough for any one! And you only a girl, hardly eighteen yet, and—and master of such a mill! It's wonderful, wonderful!"

The maiden laughed aloud.

"Well, it belongs to me now, and won't

I worry you to death, you dear old Franz !
Where is Susanne ?”

“She is in her room, she’s bad again,
poor old body. The housekeeping be-
comes hard for her now. Dr. Bruck is
with her.”

The young lady gave him her hand and
turned away and entered the house. The
heavy oak door closed with a bang behind
her, making the walls shake with the clash
and noise, and the dust fly up in showers
about her. As she passed on through the
corn-room into the house, the perfume of
the grain arrested her attention, and caused
her to pause, bringing back to her memory
the time she had lived in this house as a
little girl. For a moment the bright colour
fled from her cheeks, and her steps
falterd as she thought of the difference

between her childhood and her present position.

Yes, she had always loved to "creep about" the mill, as the old lady in the Villa had remarked, and with a sigh she remembered how often "dear papa" had shaken the flour from her long hair and frock, as he kissed her and called her his white little mill mouse. The gloomy old man, her grandfather, who so rarely spoke to her and never loved her, out of whose way she would run into Susanne's bright kitchen or slip away to Franz in his room, perhaps, if he could see her now, might forgive her for being the cause of his daughter's death, since she had grown so like her grandmother.

She passed on and came at last to the corner-room, but the door was locked, so,

not being able to enter, she turned aside down a small corridor and had just reached the top of a back flight of steps, when the sound of a complaining voice arrested her attention.

"This must be Susanne's bedroom," she thought, as she opened the door without knocking and walked in.

It was a miserably poor uncomfortable room, dark and damp and with scarcely any furniture worth mentioning. A warm sickly current of air greeted her as she entered, and the first thing that she saw in the dim light was the tall broad-shouldered figure of a man standing with his back towards her. He was evidently just about to depart, for he had his hat and stick in his hand.

"That must be Dr. Bruck," the girl

thought to herself. "Franz said he was with Susanne."

And then she remembered that her guardian had written some six months ago and informed her of the engagement of her beautiful half-sister Flora to a young doctor, who had loved her from the time he was a student, though of course he had not told his love to the rich proud girl till he had something of a position to offer her. Since then Kathe had heard no more about the young couple, and had forgotten the circumstance till the mention of Dr. Bruck's name by Franz and finding him here by Susanne's bedside brought him back to her memory. It was either the rustling of her silk dress or the sweet breath of pure air she brought in with her which caused the tall figure to turn suddenly round and open his eyes in

astonishment at the figure standing in the doorway.

“Dr. Bruck? I am Kathe Mangold,” the girl said hurriedly, then, not waiting for him to speak, she moved quickly to the bedside, and stretched out both her hands to the old woman propped up on the pillows.

Susanne stared at the young lady in dull surprise.

“I have walked in like the fresh air, haven’t I, dear Susanne? And at the right time too,” she said cheerfully as she smoothed the grey hair on the old woman’s forehead, and pushed an untidy lock into its place under her nightcap. “How can you like to be in such a wretched room as this? The stove smokes and I can see the mildew on the walls. How

can you prefer such a garret to the nice corner-chamber? Did no one tell you you were to have that room, and sleep in the cabinet at the side?" asked the girl as a slight frown dimmed the smile on her lips.

"Yes, the Counsellor said I was to go there, but I should grow silly if I sat in that room all day alone like a grand lady, or I should become like the poor dear master, now dead and gone."

The young lady bit her lip to keep from laughing.

"But, Susanne, when grandpapa was alive you could sit there if you liked, you know. Your spinning-wheel used to stand in the window—and I can remember many a time putting it out of order—and on the drawers stood your work-basket. Doctor,"

she said, suddenly moving nearer the young man, "will it do her any harm if she changes her room?"

"By no means—I have urged the same thing, but my patient opposes me at every turn," he replied with a shrug of his shoulders, in a sonorous but well modulated voice.

"Then there's no need to lose any time," said Kathe decidedly, as she took off her gloves and jacket and laid them on the bed.

"Nothing 'll make me go there," exclaimed the old housekeeper. "Don't, please don't, Fräulein Kathe," she begged in a whining tone. "That room is the apple of my eye—ever since I heard you were coming, I have scrubbed and cleaned it from morning till night, to make it nice

for you—only the day afore yesterday I put clean curtains up. No, no, I can't go, I won't."

"Very well, you can do as you like—I did intend asking you to give me a cup of coffee in the mill this afternoon, as you used to do when I was a child. However, as you are so obstinate, I shan't come at all, of that you may be quite sure. I shall only stay a month in M—— and then you may let any one you like sleep in the clean room with the fresh curtains ; I don't care !"

That was enough ; the girl's manner was so cool and determined that the young doctor judged this was not the first time she had had to manage a wayward invalid.

Susanne sighed, but she slowly put her

hand under the pillow and drew forth a key which she laid on the sheets.

Kathe quietly took it up, and going over to the wood-basket by the stove, said, as she lifted two or three of the billets in her strong young arms,

“Wait a little, while I light the fire in the corner-room.”

“No, that you can’t do, I’m sure,” said Dr. Bruck quickly as he glanced expressively at her elegant toilette—at the same time laying his hat and stick on the table.

“Then I ought to be ashamed of myself if I can’t,” she replied earnestly, but with heightened colour, for she had remarked the young man’s doubtful look.

She left the apartment and a few

moments' later the fire was burning brightly in the stove of the corner-room, while Dr. Bruck, who had followed her, opened the windows, in order that the fresh spring air might chase away the close atmosphere of the place.

"I beg you to notice, Dr. Bruck, that I have lighted the fire, and that my hands are still presentable for a drawing-room," remarked Kathe after a while as she held out her slender rosy-tipped fingers for his inspection, with a mocking smile playing around her mouth.

He glanced at the young girl, and answered her smile with one as full of expression and fun as her own, but he did not reply in words. He was trying to close one of the windows, through which the wind came with so much force that it blew

the hair from off Kathe's temples, and disarranged one of the curtains at the other side of the room.

"Shut it quick, or the other curtains will come to grief," laughed Kathe, catching at the muslin and holding it back till the window was closed ; then adding in a vexed tone, but with her eyes full of earnest feeling,

"Poor old Susanne !" if she could guess how little I appreciate these clean curtains ! I suppose I must let them remain though, as they were put up expressly for me—but the idea of muslin before *such* windows, and in this handsome medieval room, too ! It's too bad, indeed it is ! And I have been dreaming that I would like to have this apartment refitted in the style of three hundred years ago—

with round oriel windows, and folding oak seats here in these recesses, and the heavy door ornamented with iron, for I am convinced that it was there once, and that grandpapa had it removed—you can see the marks of the old iron straps. And now there will have to be instead a spinning-wheel in this window with old Susanne on a chair beside it!" and she sighed after a moment, adding,

"I had planned it all out so nicely, and now I know she won't let me touch it."

"But I don't understand—you are the mistress here, are you not?" asked the doctor hesitatingly, and looking at this girl with one of his grave searching glances.

"Oh yes, I know that, but I shall never be able to assert my authority in such matters,

I am convinced beforehand—I am a born coward,” she replied, in a low tone, but the contrast between this meek confession and the bright fearless bearing of the young lady appeared so ludicrous, that it was not till the doctor had glanced again into the shy soft brown eyes that he could believe she spoke the truth concerning her want of courage to assert her authority respecting any wishes of her own.

Quietly moving from the window, Kathe began arranging the furniture for the comfort of the invalid. The large broad sofa was turned into a bed, her grandfather's old leather arm-chair was drawn out of the draught by the window, and placed nearer the stove, a little table was fetched from the adjoining cabinet, and put by the chair, as also a

rather high foot-stool, which she discovered in one of the corners, all of which Kathe did in a quick independent way, as if she were accustomed to do this kind of thing every day of her life. It almost seemed, as she flitted about the room, as if she must have forgotten the presence of the young man standing in the embrasure of the window. But presently she opened the top drawer of the press, and took out a white linen table-cloth bordered with red, which she unfolded and spread over the table by the easy-chair, saying, as she turned her face partly towards him,

“There is something very pleasant in this old-fashioned order. Everything remains in its own place, just as it used to be in the good old time. It was all so

before I was born, and see, nothing has changed during my six years' absence—how home-like it all is !”

Then pointing to the mirror over the low antique press, she added,

“And there’s a corner of the almanack sticking out from behind the framework of the glass on which grandpapa wrote his memoranda, and up above there still hangs his rod with the faded ribbons which many a time used to make my mother tremble.”

“And you too ?”

“Oh no, he never took enough notice of poor little me to care what I did,” replied Kathe, with an air of amused resignation, as she began dusting the window-ledges with the long feather-brush. “We must have flowers here on this window-seat,”

she remarked after a moment's pause ;
" poor old Susanne will enjoy their perfume.
I will beg a hyacinth and a pot of violets
from my brother-in-law, he has so many in
his winter garden, and——"

" You will have to ask old Madame
Urach first ; the winter garden is her pet
amusement, and no one touches a flower
without her sanction."

Kathe opened her eyes wide with as-
tonishment, as she answered :

" Are they so very formal in their
manners at the Villa ? Why, I remember
that when papa lived the winter garden
belonged to the whole family. But then,"
and she shrugged her shoulders signifi-
cantly, " my father's mother-in-law was
only a guest from time to time at the Villa.
However, it does not matter. It's just as

well that I came to the Mill-house first," she went on thoughtfully, though her well-modulated voice had a sharp ring in it as she threw back her head, and looked earnestly at her companion ; "being here will accustom me to all that formality before I am forced to——"

Dr. Bruck turned suddenly from the window, and drew nearer the young girl.

" But what if they are angry over there at your not going to them first ?" he asked quickly, interrupting her with a slight tone of warning in his voice, as if he were anxious to give her a little advice which he felt conscious would not be heeded.

" If they are, they have no right to be," she replied without hesitation, while the colour deepened on her cheeks. " Over there is nothing more to me than if it were

a stranger's house, that is as regards taking care of me, and affection. My step-sisters and I are nothing to each other ; there is not even the link of the briefest correspondence between us. Now and then I have written to Moriz, but then he is my guardian as well as my brother-in-law. When he married my half-sister they lived in the town ; besides she died very soon. Henriette, as you know, always lived with her grandmamma. I remember that when I was quite a little girl in the nursery, Flora had the management of our house ; she was very beautiful, and very clever, but she must have wonderfully changed if one does not feel oppressed and insignificant in her presence. I never dared talk to her or even caress her lovely hand, and I think that now I am older, it would be very im-

pertinent on my part if I were to expect from her the affection usual between sisters—and——”

She interrupted herself suddenly and looked wistfully up in his face, but he turned his head towards the window and gazed out on the scenery, not helping her with a syllable of reply.

After a pause she went on.

“ As things are I cannot regard the Villa as my home ; I have no right there, and if I went I should only be treated as a guest, and be no more to them than any other visitor. But here in this Mill-house I stand on my own rights ; I am mistress here—here I am surrounded by home feelings and home associations, and I have no doubt that the old roof over head and Franz and Susanne’s care will shield me

from all harm as completely as the formality and etiquette of the family over there would at all events," and a merry smile flitted over her fresh young face; "by staying here I shall escape all censure much sooner than you think for, doctor; they won't expect *manners* from the 'miller's mouse.'"

And without waiting for the doctor's reply Kathe went over to the fire, opened the brass door of a tiny oven half way up the porcelain stove, and taking from her pocket a small bottle of eau-de-cologne, poured a few drops of the liquid on the heated iron plate. Immediately a pleasant perfume pervaded the air of the apartment.

"Susanne will feel much better when she comes here," she remarked as her eyes

wandered round the room to see if all was in order. Then, as her glance fell on the open door of the inner cabinet, through which the painted bedstead could be seen standing near to the window, and she recognized the familiar yellow roses on its head and foot boards, her face grew pale, even her lips were white as she whispered,

“It was there grandpapa died.”

The young doctor shook his head, and pointed silently to the window corner of the room in which they were now standing.

“Were you with him?” she asked gently, as she stepped closer to him.

“Yes.”

“He died so suddenly, and my brother-in-law announced the sad event to me in such a very few words, that I have not yet heard the cause of his death.”

When Kathe spoke the doctor had his profile turned towards her. His moustache and beard were very thick, but Kathe, who was looking earnestly at him, noticed that he pressed his lips together as if the words she had just uttered pained him. After a momentary pause he slowly moved round, and meeting her earnest gaze, and looking her full in the eyes, he said gravely, in a voice that trembled with emotion,

“You will be told, Fräulein, that he died from my want of skill in performing the operation.”

The young girl shrank back with fear, for a moment her eyes were fastened on the lips which had spoken, as if questioning the accuracy of his speech ; then they dropped on the ground.

“For the express purpose of calming

your fears you must allow me to add, that such a statement is entirely false," he went on in a low earnest tone ; "but how can I expect you to believe me?" he added bitterly. "We meet to-day for the first time, and naturally know nothing of each other."

She might have replied by some superficial remark vaguely expressive of sympathy for the painful position he evidently found himself in respecting the death of the miller ; but it did not occur to Kathe to utter it. He was right in saying that she could not judge if he were innocent or guilty. He certainly did not look like a man who could deliberately make a false statement ; and the girl gave a shy glance at the face before her. She felt intuitively that he would not purposely raise suspicions

in her mind, and then condescend to calm them, unless he had good reason for so doing. And as she was not capable at the moment of expressing her own thoughts, she was silent.

He had not expected her to answer, but after a moment's silence he turned away with so much pride and dignity in the movement that Kathe felt a glow of shame creep over her ; her cheeks became crimson as she whispered audibly—

“ I fully believe you. Shall I fetch Susanne now ?” then she asked in a timid voice, wondering why she suddenly felt as if she had behaved like a naughty child, and offended the dignified grave-looking man standing so still by the window.

“ Certainly.”

She left the room as quickly as possible

with the tears trembling on her eyelashes. But she dashed them away ere entering the garret where the old housekeeper sat, partly dressed with a shawl wrapped round her, ready to move into the larger room in obedience to the young mistress's will.

"Tell me about grandpapa's death, Susanne," demanded Kathe, sitting down on a low stool by the old woman. "How was it he died?"

Susanne began at once, and related the events of the late master's illness and death to her listener as well as she could and as she knew them, adding in a querulous tone—

"The affair seems to have done the young doctor no end of harm. At first every one ran after him and thought lots of him, but after master's death they all

began to whisper he didn't know his business well. That's just like people, Fräulein Kathe! He was *not* in fault about the operation; that was all right I know, for I saw it with my own eyes. The master was ordered to be very quiet after it was all over—he quiet indeed! I should think I ought to know best about his being able to keep himself quiet. Why, if Franz spoke a bit loud, or a cart drove too quick into the yard, he was in a rage in a moment. Indeed he was; I have had enough to do to bear with him I can assure you, Fräulein, and the thanks I get is not a penny left me—and, but for you, I should have to beg in my old age.”

Kathe held up her finger in warning.

“Well, well, I'll be still and say nothing,” muttered the old woman as Kathe put

another shawl round her to keep her warm. "But I do think it's hard for that good kind man the doctor to have his reputation blackened, and his bread taken away, and he doing so much for his old aunt too; why, he supports her now because she gave him her bit of money to keep him while he studied. She lives with him, and is as proud of him as a body can be, and now she'll have to suffer too."

But Kathe had lived too many years amongst her Dresden friends to feel any very strong interest in the private family history of her half-sister Flora's lover just now; she regretted vaguely for Dr. Bruck's sake that circumstances had been against the complete success of the operation, but she was too much occupied in thinking of her old grandfather's illness and death to

care what the townspeople might or might not say respecting the skill of the physician. Putting her strong young arms round the feeble body of the old housekeeper, Kathe partly lifted and partly led her out of her old garret into the more comfortable quarters she had prepared for her. The door of the corner room was open, and when Susanne appeared on the threshold Dr. Bruck left his place by the stove and stretching out both his hands lifted the tottering old woman up in his arms and placed her as gently and tenderly as a mother would her child on the comfortable pillows in the old-fashioned easy-chair.

A few moments later Kathe had covered her feet with a warm flannel, and put them on the stool, drawn the little table within easy reach of her hand, and fastened back

the clean muslin curtain in order that she might have an uninterrupted view from the window, while the old housekeeper muttered half-finished sentences of delight at really finding herself in the "grand room," and being able to watch and count each sack of flour as it was loaded or unloaded in the yard.

Taking from its pocket her tiny gold watch, and looking at the hour, Kathe said, with a slight gesture expressive of amused despair—

"It is time I went to the Villa, or I shall arrive in the middle of Madame Urach's formal tea hour, and disturb her proud guests." Then putting on her gloves she added, "I shall be back in an hour, Susanne, to cook your supper for you."

"With those white hands of yours?"

exclaimed the old woman in amazement.

“With these white hands of mine, certainly. Did you imagine they were always idle in Dresden? if you did, Susanne, you did not know my dear Lucas; she is just the same now as she always was — ever busy and never idle. You ought to see her—her equal is not to be found—she is a model doctor’s wife!” laughed the young girl, as she nodded her head and left the room.



CHAPTER IV.



HE clock was striking five as Kathe passed through the courtyard on her way to the Villa, accompanied by Dr. Bruck. The air was much colder, and the sun-dial, which a couple of hours before had brightly and distinctly marked the hour of the day, now looked grey and dull in the overcast atmosphere.

The tinkling of the gate-bell brought old Franz out on the door-step, followed by his

wife, who stretched her long neck over her husband's shoulder to have a peep at the new young mistress. Kathe spoke kindly to the woman, and begged her to go up to the Mill-house and take care of Susanne during her absence at the Villa, which she promised faithfully to do directly.

Kathe was about to continue her road, when a violent concussion was felt in the air, and a moment later a pretty little dove fell wounded and helpless on the stones at her feet.

"The devil! the villains are carrying this too far!" growled old Franz, as he stooped to pick up the poor little bird shot through the wing. "Look here, wife; this is none o' ours—I thought so—they are some vagabonds from over there, shooting the poor lady's pigeons right under her

nose. I wish I was the Counsellor—wouldn't they catch it!" he added under his breath, and shaking his horny fist.

"Who is the poor lady, Franz? and who shoots her pigeons?" asked Kathe, opening wide her eyes with astonishment.

"He means Henriette," remarked the doctor.

"And it's them at the spinning-mill who shoots," growled Franz between his teeth.

"What, the hands in my brother-in-law's mill?"

"Yes, Fräulein, they who éat his bread; I say it's a crying shame and sin. A fine business, isn't it, doctor? Now you can see for yourself what they are made of, and the good that comes of soft measures, and——"

"Are the men on strike here?" asked Kathe turning to Dr. Bruck, who had such a sweet earnest smile on his face that the girl could not resist giving him a second look.

"No, on the contrary," he replied shaking his head, his quiet well-bred voice sounding in pleasant contrast to the excited tones of the foreman. "Several of the upper workmen at the mill have saved a little money, and, when the estate was being divided off into lots, they went to your brother-in-law Moriz, and begged they might have a bit of useless land lying near the flour manufactory, for the purpose of building a few houses, to let out in rooms to those of their fellow-workmen who could not afford the high rents for lodgings in town. The Counsellor promised it to them — all the

more readily because the bit of land in question is in reality an outlying portion of the park, and——”

“Pardon my interrupting you, Herr Doctor,” broke in Franz, “but that’s just why he couldn’t do it. Directly I heard of it I knew Madame Urach would never allow it; and how could one blame her for not choosing to have neighbours of that sort about her? The ladies were very angry about it, I can tell you, and insisted that the open bit of land remained as it was, for they meant to have some plants there, and that put an end to all hope for the men at the manufactory. As you may imagine the men are furious, and revenge themselves whenever they get a chance.”

“A mean revenge too! Poor little in-

nocent thing!" said Kathe, taking the pigeon out of Franz's hand.

"The lamentable part of this business is, that this one act of barbarity will react as a punishment on the whole lot, and no one can blame proud old Madame Urach for not wishing to have such ruffians in her neighbourhood," said Dr. Bruck with a grave face.

"I don't see why. There are wicked and mean revengeful persons in every class of life," broke in Kathe impulsively; "I know a great deal about the lower classes, for the doctor in whose house I have been living had a number of poor patients, and often when he thought medicine would do no good his wife, my dear old governess, used to help him by taking soup and nourishing things instead to their homes,

and I always went with her. Sometimes, of course, we met with roughness and ingratitude—but generally with the reverse ; want and misery are always heartrending to witness and——”

“ But not so bad in reality as you think, Fräulein ; the people dissemble very often,” interrupted Franz, waving his hand. Kathe looked at him quietly for a moment ere she answered in a mocking tone—

“ What a grand man you have become, Franz ! Of whom do you speak ? Don’t you belong to the people yourself ? You are at the head of the mill now, but what were you once ? Only a labourer, a common workmanlike the rest of them in the manufactory, a workman who had to bear many a hard injustice too, as I happen to know.”

The foreman's weather-beaten old face flushed a dark and angry red, as the young lady, his mistress, reminded him in such plain unmistakable words of his position. For a moment or two he was silent after she had finished speaking, then stretching out his broad horny hand towards her, he said simply, "I didn't mean it, Fräulein; I meant no harm."

"At heart you are not bad, but you have been a fortunate man, Franz, and are hard on those who never get on," she replied, as she laid her small hand for a second in his, but the grave expression on his face did not so easily disappear.

Taking out her handkerchief, she tenderly laid it over the suffering bird, and tying the four corners together, hung it on her finger as if it had been a

basket, saying as she nodded farewell to the foreman,—

“I will take the tiny invalid to Henriette.”

“I think this will be the shortest way,” remarked the doctor, opening a small door leading direct from the courtyard into the park, and standing aside to let Kathe pass through.

“I recognize nothing here,” said the young girl, when they were outside, as she stared around with a perplexed look on her face; “it seems to me as if this part of the park had been taken up and shaken together by giant hands. What are they doing down there?” she asked, pointing in the direction of an open space, where some workmen’s heads just appeared above ground.

"They are digging a lake. Madame Urach has a fancy for looking at swans swimming about on a broad sheet of water."

"And they are building over there on the south side; what is that to be?"

"A palm-house, I believe."

"Moriz must be very rich," she said thoughtfully.

"It is said he is," was the quiet answer, but uttered in a tone that gave no indication of the speaker's private opinion on the subject.

Standing in the full light of the open air, far enough away for her to observe him at his ease, Kathe noticed what a very remarkable-looking man her companion was. His dignified military bearing and handsome sunburnt countenance, with its brown heavy moustache and curling beard, and the

clear straightforward expression shining in his eyes, made her intuitively feel that the misfortune which had happened to him in the miller's death had not come to him from want of firmness and self-possession, or from any over-confidence in his own skill.

"He would do nothing rash, I am sure, and his face is too noble wilfully to injure another if he could help it," thought the young girl, her mind still dwelling on the strange statement she had heard from his own lips, when she questioned him about her grandfather's death.

"Shall I lead you, Fräulein?"

She started, and giving a bewildering glance over the broken and filled-in pathways, accepted the arm Doctor Bruck offered her. Her hand had not rested for

two minutes on the doctor's coat-sleeve, when she suddenly drew it away again, and standing still, exclaimed with a merry silvery laugh, "What a coward I am! I do believe I'm nervous! Do you think I shall see Flora directly I arrive at the house?" and her laugh changed into a deep-drawn sigh. The young man's face flushed as he replied in a constrained tone—

"As far as I know she is out driving;" then, as if to avoid another question, he went on quickly, "you will find the whole household in a state of excitement to-day, on account of the nobility which has just been conferred on Moriz."

"And you only tell me that *now*!" she cried. "What is it for? What has he done?"

"Well, he has done a great deal to raise

and improve the commercial interests of the land," he answered, as quickly and eagerly as if there had been a doubt about it; "and Moriz has such a large heart—he does a great deal for the poor."

Kathe shook her head.

"He is a very lucky fellow, but it makes me feel anxious."

"Lucky!" repeated the young man; "that depends upon how he regards the change himself."

"As a great blessing," she replied decidedly. "I know that Moriz's chief aim in life is to rise high in social position. His last letter to me was full of self-congratulation and rapture that my fortune was far beyond what he had been led to expect."

Doctor Bruck did not answer directly;

he walked on several yards ere he asked, with a side-glance at the young girl—

“And you—do *you* not care to be richer than you thought for?”

Kathe bent her head gracefully forward, and looked him straight in the face.

“You appear to expect a very decided answer from me—a very earnest No; but unfortunately, with the best will in the world, I cannot bring myself to utter it. I think it is a very pleasant thing to be rich.”

He laughed softly to himself, but did not reply. Very soon, by rapid walking, they had reached the linden avenue, where the long broad pathway had lately been freshly gravelled. Hurrying forward to the opposite side of the avenue, the young girl stood still, and pointing to a distant wooden bridge formed of a few branches of trees

roughly fastened together across the running river, cried out joyfully—

“ Ah, the dear old friend is standing there still !”

“ That leads to the property on the other side of the river——”

“ I know, beyond the meadow and fruit-garden—but beyond that again stands an old lovely little house. In former times it was a kind of farm belonging to the Castle, and when I was here it used to be covered with a vine, and had broad stone steps leading to the hall door. It was always so quiet and still there. Susanne always bleached the linen in the garden, and in spring the ground was blue with violets ; I always hunted for the first violet there, I remember.”

“ And you can do it again if you like—

the place has become mine since this morning," he answered, casting a warm look towards the distant tiny estate.

Kathe thanked him and flushed slightly as she thoughtfully and slowly walked along the gravel pathway, wondering if her sister Flora would one day inhabit that small house as its mistress. If Flora with her proud bearing and the majestic sweep of her trailing skirts, who never considered any drawing-room in which she happened to be present too large or too costly in furniture; if Flora with her unbending ambition and love of display could bring herself to live in that old-fashioned house with its Dutch tiles and deal floors, then, indeed, she must be greatly changed from the haughty ambitious girl she had been six years ago !

From this and other thoughts of a similar kind Kathe was roused presently by the sound of approaching wheels. She looked up, and saw that they were so near the Villa that she could have traced the pattern of the lace curtains hanging at the windows. Inside the house all seemed still, but along the carriage-drive leading to the grand entrance, a pair of magnificent bay horses came trotting nearer and nearer, drawing a handsome low phaeton, as bright and shining as only a new phaeton can be. A lady held the reins with a light firm hand. She was wrapped from head to foot in rich costly fur—the white drooping feather in her hat well became the classical beauty of her face, and contrasted exquisitely with the golden colour of her hair, one braid of which had escaped from

its fastening, and hung over the rich dark fur on her shoulder.

“Flora! how lovely she is!” cried Kathe with enthusiasm, as she stretched out her hand towards the passing carriage, but neither Flora nor the Counsellor, who sat by her side, seemed to have noticed the girl, for the elegant phaeton rolled rapidly onwards till it stopped before the portal of the Villa.

Two or three pebbles suddenly flew past Kathe, evidently struck unconsciously with the doctor's heavy walking-stick, and then, for the first time, the girl remarked that she was some distance in advance of her companion. She turned to meet him, and fancied that he seemed more reserved and colder in mien than he had been hitherto, and as she neared him she could hardly

repress a satirical smile from appearing on her face as she saw him glance at her figure, and then quickly fix his eyes on some other object, for she knew that she had detected him in the thought, "What an ungainly creature this girl is, in comparison with my beautiful betrothed."

"I am astonished at the cool courage Flora displays in driving," she observed, when he was close beside her again.

"Her companion's contempt for death is much more to be wondered at. Those young horses were only bought yesterday, and the Counsellor is trying them for the first time to-day," he answered between his teeth ; and Kathe felt that the man must be strongly moved to speak in such a tone.

She did a wise thing and was silent, half-frightened at the moody expression which had settled on her companion's face.



CHAPTER V.



NOT a word more was spoken by either till they reached the house and had entered the hall, where a man-servant stood watching the disappearance of the phaeton.

"Is the master at home?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, and the ladies also; they are all in the winter garden," was the answer.

"In Madame's apartments," thought Kathe to herself. She had recovered her

composure and usual calm manner, and, taking a card from her bag she handed it to the man, saying—

“Take that to the Herr Counsellor.”

“Standing on etiquette here?” said Dr. Bruck smiling, when the footman had noiselessly tripped over the Persian hall-carpets, and disappeared behind a door.

“On etiquette! certainly,” she replied earnestly, adding, “It is far the best; an unannounced entrance among the family would be bad taste on my part. As it is, I am very much afraid that I shall place the master in an awkward predicament by my unceremonious appearance.”

She had barely finished speaking when a door opened on the left side of the hall, and the Counsellor appeared.

“Good gracious, Kathe, you here!” he

stammered out in a voice that was anything but joyous in its ring.

Drawing up her figure to its full height the young girl walked across to her brother-in-law, and bowing gracefully, said with gentle dignity—

“You must not be vexed, dear Moriz, at my forestalling your intentions; I considered myself quite old enough to come without being fetched. I am no longer a child.”

He looked at her for a moment as if petrified, then recovering his wits he said slowly, as he scanned her critically from head to foot—

“Yes, you are quite right, Kathe. You are no longer the child I used to lead by the hand. Now, welcome here!”

Then noticing the doctor's presence for the first time, he added, as he gave him his hand—

“You two met in the hall—let me introduce you at once to——”

“No need to do that, Moriz! I did it for myself a couple of hours ago,” interrupted the young girl, with a mischievous smile. “Dr. Bruck was calling on his patient Susanne, when I arrived at the Mill-house.”

The Counsellor's brow became clouded.

“You went to the mill first?” he said in an embarrassed manner. “But, dear child, Grandmamma Urach has very kindly expressed her intention of receiving you, and you ought to have come direct to her, instead of going first to see your old friend Susanne the old housekeeper.

For goodness' sake, don't mention it in there!" he whispered earnestly.

"Do you really expect that from me?" said Kathe, her clear ringing tones sounding almost startling in contrast to the Counsellor's anxious whisper. "I cannot tell a falsehood if the subject is mentioned—I have no love for secrecy, Moriz; but if—" and for an instant she shrank back speechless at the dark glow which overspread his face, then, as it faded away and left him paler than usual, she went on courageously, "if I have done wrong, I shan't mind acknowledging it; it will not cost me my head, I suppose!"

"If you take a kindly hint in that tragic fashion, then of course I have nothing more to say," he replied some-

what sharply. "It won't cost you your head, but it will considerably increase the difficulty of your position in my house. However, do as you will! You will soon find out for yourself if such direct straightforwardness will answer in the refined circle you will mix in here!" he added more facetiously than he had yet spoken, as he led the way to the dining-room adjoining the winter garden, and opened the door.

But inside it was no longer the simply furnished old-fashioned room Kathe remembered. The wall which had separated it from the winter garden had been removed, and in its place two or three handsome columns supported the ceiling, of exquisite colour and design, at the base of which a bronze

grating ornamented with gold connected the columns with the sides of the room, and divided the highly-polished inlaid flooring of the apartment from the tessellated pavement of the winter garden. Behind the grating it was one mass of flowers and evergreens ; sweet-scented may-flowers perfumed the air, costly Parma violets grew in rich luxuriance at the foot of a handsome dragon tree, and everywhere the rarest and choicest plants were arranged in artistic order ; the whole place framed in by daintily-ornamented walls and stained glass windows. From the roof above the pillars hung several baskets of richly-coloured trailing creepers, under one of which Flora was standing as the door opened. She still wore her costly

furs; one of the creeping branches of the clematis attached to the columns had caught across her hat, as she held up her black satin skirt with one hand, while the other rested gracefully against the columns, as soft and creamy in its colour as the clematis bloom above her head.

As Kathe's tall figure advanced into the room, she raised her eyebrows with an air of astonishment not unmixed with curiosity, followed, a moment later, by a sudden drooping of the eyelids, while a sarcastic smile flitted round her lips.

"Now, Flora, guess whom I have brought!" cried the Counsellor.

"That won't take me long or be difficult either. It is Kathe, who has evidently travelled here alone," replied

Flora in her usual prompt and decided manner. "Besides, any one who knew old Frau Sommer must see in an instant that this tall girl with her pink and white apple-blossom face must be her granddaughter. But her eyes and hair are strikingly like your late wife's, Moriz; Clotilde's eyes were exactly like hers at her age."

With a supple movement she freed herself from the clinging clematis bough, and stepping towards her young half sister, bent her head to kiss her.

Yes, that was Flora, unaltered in any outward respect, except perhaps that the lines about the mouth and chin were slightly harder, from long years of constant indulgence of power and command. With the same cool indifferent manner

as she had kissed her sister after six years' separation, she now turned to Dr. Bruck and said, as she carelessly held out her hand, not as a girl greeting her lover, but rather as if two college chums were addressing each other—

“How do, Bruck?”

The young man took her hand for a moment and then let it go again without any reply to her laconic greeting.

This state of perfect indifference of manner between the betrothed pair seemed to be an understood thing with the Counsellor, but Kathe, whose experience of lovers was of a very different kind, could hardly repress her astonishment, and gazed from one to the other in silent perplexed amazement.

“Grandmamma!” cried Flora, turning her head in the direction of the winter garden with a malicious twinkle in her expressive eyes — “Grandmamma, our little one has given you and your family the pleasure of looking at her a month before she was expected.”

At Flora’s first call the elderly lady emerged from behind a group of camellia plants, regarding with a keen curiosity, unknown to herself, perhaps, the young girl just arrived; but at the conclusion of Flora’s mischievous remark, Madame Urach knit her brows in an ominous frown, and her pale face coloured with displeasure as she replied in an icy tone—

“I am not aware that I ever expressed any great curiosity for ‘looking at’ your sister, as you say, Flora. When I ex-

pressed my pleasure at Kathe's coming amongst us, and said that she would be welcome, it was because she is the daughter of your dear departed father, and your sister."

And so saying, she moved a few steps forward, and held out both her hands as if to embrace the young girl; but Kathe, pretending not to see her intention, curtseyed with a low ceremonious bow before the old lady, as if she now for the first time in her life stood in the presence of her father's proud mother-in-law. An observant looker-on would have divined the motive for this strange act on the young girl's part from the sarcastic curl of her lip, but the old lady accepted it as a simple mark of the deep respect her presence excited in the mind of her

lately-arrived guest, and kissing her on the forehead, her eyes glancing uneasily towards the door as if expecting Kathe's travelling companion to enter, she said—

“Did you really come alone as Flora suggests?”

“Certainly I did, Madame; I wished to try how I could get on independent of any one, and my kind governess said I was quite right,” replied Kathe, unconsciously passing her fingers over the place the elder lady had touched with her cold lips.

“Yes, of course, that is just like her,” said Madame Urach, with a smile of pitying scorn hovering about her mouth. “She was always a very independent person, and your dear papa spoiled her, my

dear, and let her do exactly as she liked, though, of course, I must allow she always did right——”

“And judiciously, too—and that is why, I have no doubt, that papa confided to her care his untameable youngest daughter,” broke in Kathe in the free unembarrassed manner that was her special charm—but which did not seem to please Madame Urach.

Shrugging her shoulders with a deprecating air the old lady replied—

“Your father did what he thought best for your welfare, dear Kathe, and I have never been in the habit of criticizing his actions. But he was a man who had a great admiration for decorum of manner in ladies, and—I wonder what he would have thought of his little daughter’s

impulsive proceeding in arriving at home in this sudden and unceremonious way?"

"I can't say," replied Kathe. "But papa would have known and acknowledged whose blood ran in his child's veins—miller's blood, Madame, able and willing to face the world fearlessly."

The Counsellor cleared his throat and stroked his handsome moustache at the conclusion of this bold remark, and "Grandmamma" looked as if she had suddenly encountered a blast of cold air straight in the face, but Flora laughed aloud and clapped her hands as she exclaimed,

"Good gracious, child, how ingenuous you are!—Grandmamma," she added, turning with a malicious gleam in her eyes

to the elderly lady who had recovered her usual calm manner, "Grandmamma, Kathe should be made to repeat that sentiment the first time she is present at one of Moriz's grand entertainments—wouldn't it make everybody open their eyes!"

"My dear, I shall trust to Kathe's inborn tact and refined taste to know what to say under *such* circumstances," answered the old lady shaking hands with the doctor, and parting her thin lips in one of her peculiar smiles, that no one was quite certain whether it was meant in sweetness or in bitterness.

"Tact, tact, that's all very well to say," said Flora, shaking her head incredulously. "Freedom from conven-

tional restraint seems also inborn. The fault lies in that her old governess does not seem to have understood how to teach her worldly wisdom. However, I for my part am glad you have come alone, Kathe, and I think it is better for you to be alone and independent than tied to the apron-strings of your old-fashioned homely governess."

Kathe had taken off her hat, the perfumed heat of the room making her feel too warm—and thus displayed the coils of golden-brown hair crowning her head, which made her appear even taller than before.

"Homely? my dear old Lucas homely?" she cried, scornfully throwing back her head with a graceful movement that well became her young supple figure.

"A more refined poetical woman it would be difficult to imagine."

"Oh, yes, grows enthusiastic over the moon, and copies sentimental verses—or perhaps she composes herself, is that it?"

The young girl fixed her glowing eyes with a proud look on the face of her half-sister as she answered after a moment's hesitation—

"She does not copy sentimental verses, but her husband's manuscripts, because his handwriting is difficult to decipher—and she does not write novels and poetry because she has no time, and yet there is plenty of poetry in her. Ah yes, Flora, you may laugh and be sarcastic, as of old, but you can't make me alter my opinion of my dear old governess. She brings

the poetry of her nature into everyday use, in the charming way she manages her house, and makes her simple home a place of love and happiness—every corner of the house she seems to fill with her bright smile and pleasant thoughts as she looks after the comfort of her hard-working husband, my troublesome self, and anybody and everybody about her.”

“Bravo, Kathe !” cried Henriette emerging from the winter garden, throwing a handful of fresh-gathered violets against the young girl’s bosom, from whence they fell to the floor. “Bravo ! I would rush over and embrace you, but—look at me,” she added as she pressed her hands together across her breast, and leant against the bronze grating ; “look at me—and—don’t you want to laugh ? You are so strong

and healthy-looking, and I—I—” her voice faltered, and she turned away.

In an instant Kathe was by her side with her arms round the poor little deformed figure, kissing her gently, and with the tears rolling down her own cheeks, asking her how it was she had grown “so terribly thin.”

Flora bit her lip as she watched the handsome girl bending with such tender solicitude over her weak little half-sister, and a cloud passed across her brow as the unwelcome thought arose, that perhaps this fearless creature, with her bright young face and truth-loving tongue, might prove a thorn in her path, by casting a shadow over the hitherto undisputed sway of the proud beauty. The thought seemed to heat her forehead, for she lifted her hat

and pushing her hair from her temples, said impatiently, as she glanced significantly at the white bundle still hanging from Kathe's wrist—

“Did you bring that very aristocratic-looking parcel with you from Dresden?”

Without deigning a reply to her elder sister's question, Kathe undid the knot of the handkerchief, and, handing the wounded pigeon to Henriette, said gently—

“It belongs to you ; the poor little thing was shot in the wing and fell down on the pavement of the mill courtyard while I stood there.”

Thus her visit to the Mill-house was told quite unconsciously, but Madame Urach did not appear to have noticed the end of Kathe's sentence. With heightened colour and a stern expression of counte-

nance she turned to the Counsellor, and pointing to the wounded bird, said reproachfully—

“That’s the *fourth*, Moriz.”

“And my pet, my little silver-headed treasure!” cried Henriette wiping away the tears that *would* run down her pale thin cheeks.

“I must entreat you, dear grandmamma, not to reproach *me* on this subject any more,” replied the Counsellor white with fear and anger. “I have done all I can to find out the culprit or culprits and put a stop to this sort of thing, but the wretch covers himself behind the phalanx of a couple of hundred of disappointed and exasperated men, and there is really nothing to be done,” he added shrugging his shoulders. “I have begged Henriette

over and over again to confine her pigeons to the house till the men have calmed down, but——”

“So we will have to give way, you think? Perhaps that course will be the best to pursue,” said the old lady, with bitter sarcasm, as she slightly lifted the lace scarf she wore from her shoulders. “Didn’t you say yourself, Moriz, that indifference on our part would only encourage them in their daring? Depend upon it they will soon tire of shooting tame pigeons, and fly at higher game.”

“Then why remain so inactive, grand-mamma? They are not so on the other side,” remarked Flora carelessly. “This morning my maid found another threatening letter lying on my window-sill; it was such a dirty filthy bit of paper that she

wouldn't touch it with her fingers, but held it with the fire-tongs while I read it. It is still in her room, Moriz, if you wish to make use of it. There is nothing new in it, of course — always the same phrases. But I should certainly like to know why these men single me out to vent on me their hatred of the upper classes."

Kathe looked up at her sister, and the involuntary thought arose in her mind that it was perhaps not so much the upper classes as a body that were here hated as the proud, haughty, overbearing individual who had been thus singled out as a fitting recipient for these dirty marks of the angry men's intentions.

"Besides, it makes it almost ludicrous that I should be thus threatened, considering they know how interested I am in the

social question," continued Flora with a forced laugh. "I have already published several articles in favour of the working man."

"Writing alone doesn't accomplish much now-a-days," remarked Dr. Bruck from across the room. "The most powerful pens have worn themselves to the stump in writing on the subject, and yet the movement gains daily more force, and sweeps into air all such written theories."

Every one turned and looked at the doctor, but Flora asked pointedly—

"What ought to be done then?"

"What ought to be done?" he repeated quietly; "go amongst the men and examine for yourself the justice of their demands. What's the use of your attempting to try and solve the problem of

‘the for and against’ from a mass of papers and documents on your table which——”

“But I beg——” and her eyes flashed with an angry glare.

“Which only adds confusion to an already complex question,” he went on, not noticing her interruption. “It is not likely your articles are ever read by the workmen, and if they were, what good could they do? Words, written words won’t build them houses. But the women related to the masters have great power and influence in these matters if they only knew how to use them, by softening the stern decisions of their husbands and fathers and the masters, and inducing them by gentle persuasions to yield now and again to just demands even if it appears

against their own interests for the moment. But few women take the trouble to think about the question at all, and if they do, they don't allow their hearts to speak. They adopt the lamentable method in fashion now-a-days of coping with men before the public, quite forgetting that their sphere of action ought to be at home, and that they only increase and widen the breach each time they depart from it."

Madame Urach smoothed the folds of her satin dress with her slender hands, and, without any reference to the latter part of Dr. Bruck's remarks, replied coldly, when he had finished speaking.

"I agree with you, but I am not accustomed to give my alms direct to the poor, so I have no doubt they have no idea either how much or how often I give ;

still their ignorance on the point does not distress me, not even if it accounts for the rough acts committed lately."

"These rough doings are disgraceful. No one can condemn them more strongly than I do," replied Dr. Bruck coolly, "but——"

"Well, but? You mean, I suppose, that it is we 'women related to the masters' who have provoked these outrages — eh?"

"Yes, I do, Madame," boldly answered the young doctor, drawing closer to the old lady. "By preventing the master from assisting his workmen in a very plausible scheme for the benefit of both. The workmen's demand in this case was not of the exaggerated unjust kind which leads to misery and vexation of spirit on both

sides, they neither asked for nor expected alms ; all they want is a little help from the owner of the manufactory to carry on their work more satisfactorily, and to make their daily existence less hard."

The old lady touched him lightly on the arm as she said in an amiable but cold tone, hoping to end the discussion—

"You are a decided idealist, Herr Doctor."

"No, no, but a philanthropist if you will," he asserted in reply, as he smiled and took up his hat to depart.

Flora was standing with her back towards him, apparently gazing out of window, but no woman's full face could have expressed stronger anger and annoyance than did the profile of her firmly-compressed lips and dilated nostril. That

the doctor had been daring enough to openly assert that *she* gathered her ideas, or rather wrote her articles, from the contents of other papers, was simply unbearable. *She*, with her great gifts! But to suggest that it was part of her duty to look personally into the cause and wherefore of these demands; she, who had never put foot over the threshold of her brother-in-law's factory, and to find out for herself *why* she urged with her pen reform—really it was too wanting in tact altogether! Besides, if it was necessary to personally inspect the truth before describing it, what was the use of being endowed with imagination and genius? Absurd! Her lover had never, before to-day, made any mention of her literary talents, from “shyness and admiration” she

had hitherto believed, and now he suddenly condemns her work in round plain terms, and—*he* ! it is too much.

“Grandmamma !” she exclaimed with heightened colour and knitted brows. “I don’t understand your making use of the term ‘Idealist!’ It seems to me that Dr. Bruck has expressed himself very plainly on the subject. According to him, we ought to give up comfort and luxury and go about in sackcloth and ashes ; and, instead of cultivating our talents, cook soup for the peasants. It seems, too, that it is a sin to prefer the quiet and seclusion of our park, and that we ought to enjoy a pack of workmen’s children holloaing and screaming under our windows, and if you are not good and submissive to his dictates, behold a spectre is placed at our

door to frighten us !” then, catching her breath, she added, “ Besides, a philanthropist ought to act as well as teach. If things come to the pass he hints at, the spectre will do with him as he would with us.”

“ I have not much to lose,” said the doctor smiling.

Flora hurried a few steps forward, her jacket hanging half on the floor.

“ You can’t say that now,” she answered cuttingly. “ Moriz tells me that to-day you take possession of some property you have bought. Is it really true that you have carried out your threat of yesterday, and purchased that wretched old ruin over the river.

“ My *threat* ?”

“ Well, what else can I call it ? You

said yesterday that if you bought this place, which to me is the ne plus ultra of wretchedness, poverty, and hideousness, that it would take all your savings, and you have purchased it. You can't possibly have bought it for its beauty alone, and that is why I ask you seriously who is going to live there?"

"You have no need to put foot in it."

"Of course I shan't, of that you may be quite certain. I would rather——"

It would be difficult to describe the young doctor's look as he raised his hand to stop whatever was about to follow, but it was sufficient for the purpose, and the rosy lips closed in obedience to his strong will.

After a moment's hesitation he said quietly, as if it were a matter of perfect

indifference to him and his betrothed also.

"I intend my aunt to live in the little house, merely reserving to myself a room where I can pass a few hours at my leisure during the summer months."

"Hope you will enjoy it! a special summer residence! And in winter then?"

"In winter? Then I shall be content with the room that you decided upon for me in our married home."

"Oh! but—I don't care about the house you refer to. It stands at a corner of the street, and the noisy rolling of the carts and carriages will be insufferable when I am working."

"Very well, then, I will give it up

and look for another more suitable," he replied with unmoved equanimity.

Flora turned away shrugging her shoulders, and with an expression of annoyance clouding her beautiful face that made Kathe fancy she would like to stamp her foot if she dared ; as it was, she threw back her head, and her eyes flashed fire as she muttered between her teeth—

"Will he ever understand?"

Just at this moment Madame Urach rang the bell so violently that the unusually loud clanging was heard on the other side of the house.

The old lady seemed angry and distressed that her grand-daughter had so little tact as to discuss this painful question with her lover in the presence

of a stranger ; and to put an end to the unwelcome topic, she said to Kathe—

“ You will receive a strange impression of the good feeling and hospitality of our household, my dear. You have not been asked to take off your jacket or to sit down after your journey, and have been obliged, whether you will or not, to listen to discussion on a matter that cannot possibly interest you ; standing too on the cold marble floor instead of being taken care of.”

Then, when a footman appeared in answer to her ring, she ordered him to tell the housekeeper at once to prepare one of the guest-chambers for the young lady's use.

While these orders were being given

the Counsellor helped Kathe take off her heavy fur mantle, and drew up a chair for her to sit on, and Henriette left the winter garden with a deep spot of red on each cheek, and the tears in her eyes.

"Won't you stay and have tea with us?" asked the old lady, as Dr. Bruck bowed low before her in token of his departure.

"No, thank you, not to-day. I have two or three patients I must see," he replied courteously, not noticing the sarcastic curl of Flora's lip as he uttered the words; then he shook hands with her and Moriz, and bowing ceremoniously to Kathe as he had done to the old lady, he left the room.

"Flora," said Madame Urach in a

sweet tone, as soon as the door was closed on the doctor's retreating figure, "I must beg that for the future you will avoid the repetition of such scenes as we have just had to witness. You have elected to be free, or rather to act as you think best—good. Up to the present time I have not interfered with you in the slightest degree; but I will not allow you to act as you have just thought fit to do in *my* presence—I absolutely forbid it! must I repeat what——"

"No, no, don't repeat anything, dear grandmamma!" interrupted Flora rudely. "It all comes to the same thing and signifies simply that it does not matter what happens in the house, provided that Frau Präsidentin Urach's conduct is not in

fault! Pardon me, grandmamma, I will not offend again. The house is large enough, and one is not obliged always to cross your orbit. Ah, how I wish things were not so hard for me! Sometimes I am afraid that I shall lose patience, and——”

“Flora!” exclaimed the Counsellor in a tone of entreaty and warning.

“Ah, yes, of course, Herr von* Römer! I must not forget the position due to your new rank. Good heavens! how everything seems to weigh on my shoulders! But why do I merit this visitation because hearts attach themselves to me like—like burs?”

She picked up her hat and gathered her skirts together to leave the room, but Kathe stood in her way.


* *Von* is a title of nobility in Germany.

“You see what happens to us unfortunate single women, my dear ; if, in a weak moment, we yield to sentiment and imagine ourselves in love,” she remarked to her younger sister, laying her hand playfully under her chin, “we only come to grief. Take warning by me, child, and look well that you don’t follow my example!”

And before Kathe could reply, she left the room.



CHAPTER VI.

LOSE to the western boundary of the park stood the remains of a noble edifice, the Baumgarten Manor-house. Of the grand old castle with its drawbridge and moat, nothing now remained but one turreted chamber of huge dimensions and a portion of one of the wings, for the building itself had been demolished some sixty years before. The proprietor at that time, who lived most of the year abroad, had had the Manor-house

rebuilt with the same blocks of granite, but in the villa style, and placed at the extreme corner of the estate, in order as he said "To be within sight of his fellow-beings," whenever he passed a few weeks in his own country.

But the tower and its adjacent broken-down walls had not been disturbed, and were respected as forming an attractive monument enhancing the value of the property. This tower arose on the summit of a rising piece of ground with masses of tangled brushwood growing in rich profusion around its base, while from its grand old window-niches and dilapidated walls hung festoons of clustering wild roses intermixed with the wild gooseberry tree. The creeping hop plant clung in beautiful green contrast against the dark, time-worn

stones of its portals and broken-down supports.

Up to the time of the present generation the old ruin, surrounded with its deep natural moat, had admirably answered its purpose as a landmark in the neighbourhood; but when it fell into the hands of its late owner it was turned to a much more practical use. The water had been drained from the moat, and a quantity of vegetables planted in the rich soil of its bed and sides. According to the late miller this was the most profitable return he had yet had for the money he had spent in the purchase of this corner of the park, and the result of this new plan had so pleased him that he gave orders that the produce of this portion of the ground was to be devoted to his own personal

requirements. Here it was that Kathe, who called the place the "little valley," used to wander about as a child, too young to understand the desecration that had befallen the noble old water-castle and its surroundings, and while revelling in the rich abundance of ripe wild strawberries, which grew larger and riper here than anywhere else, in happy ignorance that at any moment some sudden breach in the river embankment might overwhelm her and Susanne and the whole of the green valley around them, with rushing angry floods of water.

A few days after her arrival she visited for the first time the old familiar spot, and stood gazing in bewilderment at the scene before her. The hop plants hung leafless, not a vestige of green grass was to be

seen on the rising ground, yet the April sun shone warm and bright on the massive old ruin, lighting it up in strong relief against the dark mass of fir trees in the distant background.

Not a trace of fresh mortar could be discovered on the old walls, not one new stone could be singled out from the old ones around. Yet there was no gap or broken partition, such as Kathe so well remembered used to be there when she was a child ; the only open places were the huge gaping window-frames, which were formerly closed in with planks of wood, but which now streamed with light, showing the dark inward recesses beyond. New fresh life seemed to reign all around the place—overhead, white and coloured pigeons circled round and round the crown

of the tower, and from beneath a group of ancient nut trees on the south side of the old tower, two tame deer came slowly scampering over the soft sward. The little valley had quite disappeared, and in its place a broad sparkling stream flowed rapidly and peacefully along, as if man's hand had never had any power over its course.

A bridge suspended by chains was swung across the stream, at the opposite side of which lay an enormous bull-dog, with his head resting on the bank, apparently watching with keen interest the approaching figures.

"Behold Moriz's Tusculum, Kathe!" said Henriette catching hold of her arm; "once upon a time the scene of many an act of cruelty and baronial magnificence, only a

few months ago the undisputed haunt of owls and bats and some of my pigeons, but now the drawing-room, bed-chamber, and royal treasury or safe room, of the noble Counsellor Herr von Römer ! Doesn't the old place look dark and shaky, and as if the very next storm of wind would blow it to the earth ? yet I can assure you that it is as firm and solid as masons and builders can make it ; and look there, in a room beneath that overhanging stone Moriz's servant lives, and good quarters he has too, and no mistake."

"According to taste, my dear," remarked Flora who had accompanied the two girls. "A wonderfully original idea for a business head, don't you think so, Kathe ?" she added, shrugging her shoulders with a scornful gesture as she went forward, and

walking across the little bridge pushed the dog out of her way with a touch of her foot and landed on the other side. The rustling of her silk dress frightened the deer back into the shade of the nut trees, and seemed to make the dog growl as he followed his tyrannical mistress till she reached the door of the castle. As she stood at the entrance to this time-honoured building, her hand resting against the iron buttress, her head with its crown of golden plaits slightly thrown back over her shoulder, her rich silk dress hanging in graceful folds around her, she might have been painted as the lovely daughter of a captive Emperor, about to seek her father in his turreted prison.

Involuntarily Kathe glanced from Flora's handsome well-rounded figure to the frail

being at her side, whose sharp attenuated form and pale suffering face made her heart ache to watch. The poor girl breathed with difficulty, and her complexion was so sallow it did not require a very quick observer to note that she was weaker than usual from excessive physical pain. And yet Henriette would not acknowledge herself worse than usual the last day or two, and each time any one of the household suggested that she must be suffering, she seemed so angry and annoyed that it was generally considered it would be the kindest thing to leave her alone.

The truth was Dr. Bruck had been suddenly called away to visit a patient at a distance, and would be "absent for several days," he had informed Flora in a note hastily written before his departure,

and as he had always been able to alleviate Henriette's attacks sooner than any other doctor, she would not allow herself to be attended by even the famous court physician, Dr. von Bär, during his absence.

"I will die sooner!" she exclaimed when urged to allow him to prescribe for her, and the energy with which she uttered this sentence so exhausted her, that she was left in peace and urged no more.

For several days Kathe nursed her tenderly and gently, and when she was able to be out in the open air again guided her faltering steps with her strong and healthy young arms—as she was doing now while leading her slowly across the hanging bridge.

How well Kathe remembered peering through the key-hole of this same iron

door when she roamed about the town as a little girl! She had been told that a quantity of gunpowder was hidden in the dark cellars, which might blow up at any moment, and that ugly cruel instruments for torturing people still hung on the walls.

She had been able to discern nothing but black darkness, but nevertheless she had many a time trembled with fear when a gust of strong wind had swept a damp current of air against her face as she pressed it to the ancient lock, and if an owl flew from its hiding-place aloft, she would rush back to Susanne in vague terror that some of "those ugly things were coming out of the darkness to take hold of her." And yet, in spite of her childish fear, the old place had a wonderful attraction and charm

for the lonely little girl, for many of the happiest days of her early years were spent in roaming about under the brush-wood and trees which had overgrown its walls.

Now, for the first time in her life she stood within its portals, and could not help being astonished at the wonder-working power of this rich merchant prince's gold. Outside, the Tower looked as if it were an old ruin, but inside it was a superbly-decorated knightly residence. A grand vaulted arch stretched from one side of the hall to the other, supported by stone buttresses of magnificent proportions. On the walls those "ugly, cruel things" still hung—weapons and helmets of rare and costly workmanship—but arranged with taste and in order, and

with the slanting sun-rays glittering on their burnished steel with strange and weird effect.

Presently the two young girls slowly mounted the handsome staircase and entered a room on the upper story. Here they found Flora gracefully leaning back on the velvet cushions of an easy-chair with a lighted cigarette between her fingers, watching her brother-in-law making coffee in an elegant silver cafetière.

"Well, Kathe! what do you think of it?" exclaimed the Counsellor, as the girls appeared, and he waved his hand around the room to intimate that he referred to the costly new furniture.

Kathe stood still for a moment on the threshold of the door, a black veil loosely

thrown over her golden-brown hair, her clear laughing eyes full of merriment, and yet with a certain haughty glance in them that just at this moment made her look like a lineal descendant of the proud old family to whom the place had formerly belonged, ere answering gaily—

“Romantic in the extreme, Moriz! The illusion is perfect. And down there,” pointing through the open window at her left to the shimmering water beneath, “down there one might be startled at the solemn aspect of things, if one didn’t know that a Counsellor of the present nineteenth century sat inside.”

He knit his brows gloomily together and glanced uneasily at her face, but she did not notice the look as she went on :

“It was neither right nor praiseworthy

to convert the old ground into a vegetable garden : I think *that*, although I loved the place very dearly in my childhood. But don't you think it a strange freak of fortune that the merchant of to-day should renew the lists deserted and neglected by the high-born knights of old ?”

“ You must not forget, my dear Kathe, that *I* belong now to the rank of knights,” replied the Counsellor in a piqued tone. The way the old nobles conformed to the spirit of the times, and allowed their grand buildings to fall into decay and ruin, is certainly sadly to be deplored. It was a decided robbery against us who come after.”

“ Simpleton ! more Catholic than the Pope himself !” murmured Henriette

under her breath, as she moved slowly towards a sofa on which she sat down, while Kathe mechanically shut the door, still regarding her annoyed brother-in-law with the thoughtful questioning gaze which his remark had brought into her eyes.

Kathe could remember how fond she had been of him when a child, as were all those who came under his influence. She knew that he belonged to a respectable mechanic's family, that he had been early left an orphan, and that owing to his good looks and pleasing manners, her father, the renowned banker Mangold, had taken him into his office as a junior clerk, and that a few years later he married his patron's eldest daughter Clothilda. By means of his wife, who up to the time

of her death was always obedient and pliant to his wishes and had great influence over her father, he succeeded in rising step by step in the bank till he reached an office of responsibility and power, and was universally loved and respected for his unswerving kindness and graciousness to those in a subordinate position. And yet this was the man who stood moodily by the table just now with an expression of haughty defiance hovering around his handsome, well-curved mouth, and an angry flash in his eye at the careless words of an invalid girl.

“Don’t, for goodness’ sake, utter treason against the ancient masters of this stronghold, dear Moriz,” said Henriette, sharply, “otherwise I shall expect to see the ghost of one of them rising up before us to see

how the brave and powerful present owner of the castle makes coffee, and to watch the charming lady over there smoke a cigarette ; how wide he would open his eyes with astonishment ?”

Flora did not stir at this malicious attack ; she merely slowly removed the cigarette from between her lips, and, while she knocked the ashes away, said, in a phlegmatic tone—

“ Does it distress you ?”

“ Me ?” and the girl laughed aloud. “ You know, Flora, that I never allow myself to be distressed at any of your vagaries ; the world is wide, and if——”

“ Nonsense ! don’t be bitter, little one. I asked simply because I know you breathe with difficulty to-day.”

A flush passed over the thin, emaciated

face, leaving it paler by contrast than before ; and the tears sprung to her eyes as she replied, with an effort—

“ Thank you ; but you had better take care of yourself, Flora. I know that each of your fingers is longing to pitch that sickly thing out of window ; for it will discolour your pearly-white teeth as it does meerschaum, and spoil your lovely complexion. And you sacrifice your sweet beauty without mercy—what for ? To prove your independence. Bah ! I am sure you have more taste than to stoop to the common artifices of a would-be blue-stocking ; and as there is no need for a sacrifice on your part to give up the glory of this hateful——”

“ Only listen to the good opinion she has of me !” interrupted Flora, in a mock-

ing tone, shaking her head as she addressed the Counsellor.

“You will make yourself ill for a week,” continued Henriette quietly, but with a ring of bitter reproach in her voice—“simply because you know who dislikes and abhors the smell of tobacco from a woman’s mouth. You do it on purpose to cause a quarrel—it is your last hope of pushing things to——”

Flora half rose from her seat, and demanded, proudly—

“Well! and what then? Is it not *my* affair whether I choose to submit or rebel?”

“Far from it! Your duty is to try and please him,” Henriette blurted out angrily.

“Absurd! Is the wedding-ring there

yet?" asked Flora, pointing to the third finger of her soft right hand.* "Thank God, not yet! Besides, you have no business to interfere and to be angry about my affairs at all. But you are ill and suffering, poor child! and seem more than ever to cling to your favourite doctor, while he thinks fit to be absent for ten days or a fortnight on a pleasurable excursion, instead of attending to his patients."

"You say that, Flora," interposed the Counsellor, "because he did not explain in detail the cause for his absence. Bruck rarely speaks of his patients and their requirements," he added, severely; "that you know. Of course, he has been called away to the sick-bed of some——"

* The Germans wear the wedding-ring on the right hand.

“What, to S——g, where the most famous of the university physicians are within reach? Nonsense! Don’t indulge in any such absurd illusions, my dear Moriz. Besides, I prefer not discussing the question with you—enough!”

And stretching forth her hand, she took up one of the exquisite cups of porcelain he had just filled with fragrant coffee, and, adding cream and sugar, drank it off feverishly.

Henriette refused the cup offered her by the Counsellor, and moved over to the glass door leading to a balcony formed by the end columns of what had once been a handsome colonnade.

The girl opened the door, and for a moment the fresh air seemed to relieve the oppression at her chest; then she

clasped her hands together, and uttered an involuntary groan of pain, which brought Kathe and the Counsellor to her side. Even Flora rose from her recumbent position, and flinging her cigarette into the ash-pan, said, grumblingly—

“I know very well that my harmless little indulgence will be held responsible for this; but it is not in fault at all. You ought to be in bed, Henriette, and not exposed to this keen spring air, which is killing in its effect on weak constitutions like yours. I told you not to come—warned you against going out at all; but you won’t listen to any kindly-meant advice, and act as if your lungs were as strong as a trumpet. And you are just as obstinate about having medical advice——”

"Because I don't choose to put my weak chest at the mercy of the first quack who appears," broke in Henriette, in an exhausted but very decided tone.

"What would the poor old Court physician say if he heard you?" replied Flora, laughing. "I don't care, child—do as you like. I too have no liking for swallowing his mixtures; but at least of this I am sure, that he never made the mistake of—nearly cutting a patient's throat while operating on him."

The Counsellor turned pale to the lips, and involuntarily raised his hand, as if he would like to press it on the lips of the slanderous girl, and oblige them to be silent. He had no power to speak; but he gazed anxiously into Kathe's face, as if

to read there the effects of this unkind speech.

“You are a heartless girl,” blurted out Henriette.

“I am not heartless ; only brave enough to call things by their right names, even when in doing so I hurt myself most. I knew that a downfall must follow such falsely-dreamed renown ; it did come, only in a far more damaging way than I had feared. Besides, it is of no use to dispute public opinion ; and in this case you know very well how bitterly it condemns him. But I think that all who know me will understand that I have no intention of sharing the burthen of such a fall. I cannot palliate or hush-up things, as grandmamma would wish to do. I’ll do nothing of the kind—I hate it. Nothing seems to me so

ridiculous as for a woman to go on worshipping and adoring a man whom the world condemns, and who has nothing left in him to adore."

She hastily flung open the other half of the glass door, and stepped out on the balcony. She had spoken with passionate earnestness, her eyes flashing, her nostrils quivering, her whole figure trembling with the emotion within her.

"Besides, he had it in his power to make me think differently, and if he had convinced *me*, how I would have defended him by word of mouth and my pen!" she went on twisting her slender fingers round the hanging creepers. "But he preferred answering my first and only question on the subject by an icy glance that would have become a proud Spaniard——"

"That ought to have satisfied you."

"Not at all, my dear Moriz. I think it was a good way of avoiding a direct answer. I am sceptical about glances and gestures, I expect something more tangible. However, to show you that I am not as bad as you think, I will do now what I longed to do at first, and that is ask you to *prove* to me and to the world that he is innocent, that he did his duty; you were there, Moriz!"

He started back suddenly from the threshold of the balcony as if he had been shot, and laid his hand across his brow to shield his eyes from the glare of light as he replied in a scarcely audible tone of voice.

"You know that what you ask is

not in my power to do. I am no doctor."

"That is enough, Moriz; not another word!" cried Henriette trembling, with the colour coming and going on her cheek as if she had fever. "Each attempt at defence that you make when this charmingly affectionate bride-elect appears anxious to have things put right, strikes me as weak and irresolute," and her bright burning eyes glanced with anger and hatred on her sister's beautiful face. "It is to be hoped that the cruel way you treat that man, Flora, will bring matters to an end, and pretty soon too, or rather, and the truth may as well be spoken for once, that he will of himself withdraw his claim to your hand as you wish him to do. He will lose nothing

by giving you up, you heartless girl ; but, unfortunately for him, he loves you, and would rather, I believe, marry you and be unhappy all his life than give you up ; he is so very blind."

"What a great pity," Flora remarked from over her shoulder.

"And for that very reason I'll do all I can to open his eyes," added Henriette with trembling lips and a broken voice.

The amused side-glance which Flora cast on her excited and angry younger sister was fast deepening into a sarcastic curl of her mouth, when a sudden thought seemed to change the whole expression of her face. Stooping slightly forward, she laid her arm round the girl's ill-grown figure, and whispered in her ear with a sardonic smile :

"Make him happy *yourself*, little one! I won't put any opposition in your way, of that you may be quite sure!"

To what degree of petty arrogance will not a woman stoop to avenge her fancied wrongs on one of her own sex! Kathe stood near enough to the sisters to hear the hissed whisper, and although she made no remark, her eyes flashed the scorn and contempt she felt.

Flora looked up and caught the expression.

"Why, what a face you are making, child! can't you understand a bit of fun?" she said, half-amused, half-perplexed. "I am not doing your nursling any harm, although I have full right to put an end, if I chose, to Henriette's malicious remarks. These two people, you must

know," and she pointed to the Counsellor and Henriette, "have taken it into their heads that they must keep watch on my morals; and you, just fresh from school, only just free yourself from rules and regulations, must needs aid and abet them against me! You are a little donkey if you think I shall care for your verdict against me!"

She laughed merrily as she finished, and leaning over the balcony shook a branch of one of the nut trees, causing a pigeon which had settled there to fly upwards in the glistening air.

"Kathe, look at her! a moment ago she was resting on the branch by the side of her companions, but now she has spread her silver wings and mounted high above our heads, and from her proud position

in the lonely heavens appears very independent to eyes looking at her from below. Perhaps you will understand something of what I mean. Apropos, Moriz," she said, suddenly interrupting herself and beckoning to him to come out again on the balcony, "Dr. Bruck's new property must lie down behind that copse, that wretched old place he has just bought; I can see smoke curling above the trees."

"Because fire is burning in the stove, I have no doubt," said the Counsellor gaily; "his aunt arrived yesterday."

"What, in that neglected old place?"

"Yes. But then the late Castle miller was far too sensible a landlord to let his property go to ruin. The place is in first-rate repair; not a nail is wanting to the

floors, or a tile out of place on the roof."

"Hope she will enjoy it! for her the place is not so bad—her old-fashioned furniture and the picture of her deceased husband will correspond with those walls, and she will have plenty of space in which to preserve and bake to her heart's content—and there is an inexhaustible supply of water for her scouring."

And Flora shuddered and pretended to be cold, and drew around her the costly shawl which had fallen from her shoulders, and gathered her skirts from the floor, as if she had been suddenly obliged to stand in a freshly-scoured room. "Let us shut the doors," she said, quitting the balcony and entering the room, "the wind brings the smoke and

damp this way—Bah!" she added, waving her fine handkerchief before her face and dilating her nostrils; "I believe the good woman is cooking pancakes now, though I don't suppose she has a chair to sit down on in the house—she must always be at something in the kitchen." And so saying Flora shut the doors.

Meanwhile Henriette had left the room—Flora's whisper had shocked her terribly, and made her feel as if she had suddenly awoke from a troubled sleep to find herself on the edge of a dangerous precipice. She did not answer, but her pale cheeks grew white as marble, and presently, unnoticed by Flora, she rose from her seat and crept slowly away up to the highest garret in the Tower, where only the doves and the jackdaws had their

haunt, and where the poor girl knew that she would be alone for a time.

When she was gone Kathe also took up her parasol, and moved towards the door. She felt instinctively that Henriette would like to be alone, so she did not think of following her—but the richly-furnished room with its subtle perfume of exotic flowers, and Flora's restless capricious movements, made her long to be out in the open air, and she announced her departure by saying that she was going to pay Susanne a visit at the Mill.

"But why in such a hurry?" asked the Counsellor; "you can see Susanne to-morrow."

"I would rather go to-day," she replied.

"Well, go then!" he said angrily, for he

saw that she was impatient to be away. "But first look here!" He drew aside a heavy Gobelin curtain, behind which in a deep niche in the wall stood a new iron safe.

"That belongs to you, Kathe," he said in a softer tone, "that is your 'Tree, little tree, each time I shake thee, shower down gold and silver on me,'" and he touched the safe caressingly. "Every thing your grandfather possessed in house and lands, forest and meadows, is there represented on paper. These papers are busy as bees working day and night in your service. They are pouring streams of gold to all parts of the world, in their own quiet way. Your late grandfather, the miller, made good use of his time, as the long list of his possessions in his will

amply proved—but even he had no idea of the vast amount of money their sale would realize.

“So that you, Kathe, are by a long way the richest heiress in the country; if you choose, you can have your dining-room paved with thalers on your wedding day, like the princess in the fairy-tale,” exclaimed Flora, who had flung herself back in a luxurious easy-chair and was holding a book in her hand. “Great pity you have so much money, child, for I am afraid that you have not been brought up in the right way for displaying your wealth advantageously before the world.”

“We must wait and see,” replied the young girl merrily. “Just now I have no right to spend one thaler of all my fortune as I like. But for the sake of the Castle

mill, I would give anything to be of age, and use a little of the gold there if only for one day," and she pointed to the iron safe with a sigh.

"Does it inconvenience you, fair lady?"

"My Mill? no more than my young life, Moriz. But yesterday I was talking to Franz in the garden, which is large and extends so far that he is forced to leave the part down by the road uncultivated. He was saying that he means to suggest to you to sell that bit, as it would be a splendid site for a villa, and would fetch a good price; but I think that we have no need to do any such thing, and—and I should like to let some of your men have it to build cottages on, those you know who want to be near your spinning manufactory and—"

"Make them a present of it, Kathe?"

"That I didn't mean exactly, and you need not snub me so sarcastically, Moriz; I know I shall be accused here of having sentimental ideas, and far-fetched notions! Besides the workmen don't ask or want charity, as Dr. Bruck says—"

"As Dr. Bruck says, indeed! Has he already become *your* oracle, Kathe?" cried Flora, springing up from her seat, dashing down her book, and fixing her eyes questioningly on her young half-sister's face.

The earnest gaze made Kathe blush for a second; but meeting her eyes with a cold indifferent expression shining out of her own clear truthful orbs, Kathe went on earnestly without noticing Flora's interruption.

"I know the value of self-earned reward, how much dearer it is than any present—and that is why I would like the workmen to have the ground at the same price as they offered to pay you for the corner they asked for, on your property."

"You would make a brilliant business woman, Kathe!" replied the Counsellor, laughing aloud. "My barren bit of land would have been a bad bargain, if it had gone at the price they offered—and the piece you would part with is rich and fertile, besides being in the heart of the property. No, no, child, however much I might feel inclined to accede to your request, my position as your guardian forbids my giving you the power, if only for one hour, of doing as you wish in this instance."

“Then the building project must lie by for a while,” she replied, neither angry nor annoyed at this refusal of her request; “three years hence I shall think exactly as I do now on the subject—of that I am quite convinced—and when I am of age I shall let the men have the bit of land without one farthing’s interest on their money.”

And she nodded her head with a merry gesture of defiance and left the room.



CHAPTER VII.



ATHE slowly descended the winding stairs, the upper half of which were so narrow that the phantom of one of the old knights would scarcely have found room to pass her, even if he had cared to leave his grave and revisit the home of his ancestors.

Just above her head on the wall of the landing-place hung the arms of the old family—the right of their noble birth, the instrument for which they had fought and

died, for the honour of which they gave up lands and houses, and became themselves strangers in the land of their forefathers. There it hung, disfigured and discoloured, and out of sight, while the instrument which had taken its place in this hall of a newly-created noble was a—modern iron safe !

She left the Tower, and wandered away down to the bridge. Leaning over the parapet for a few moments, she gazed into the water, not at the shadow of the overhanging branches, but at the image of her own face, with the coils of dark brown hair crowning the top of her small, well-shaped head. These same coils of hair she had been told she ought to put into the hands of a maid ; that a young lady of her position and wealth had no need

or right to keep them in order herself—to which she had replied that she had “no intention of turning into a dummy for several hours of the day,” while experienced hands plaited and twisted her hair into a fashionable style “that, after all,” added the wilful girl, as a clenching argument against Madame Urach’s earnest entreaty for her to have a maid, “might not become me. Oh, yes! it is very pleasant to be rich ; but I like to be free too.” And the old lady wisely for the time allowed the subject to drop.

Leaving the bridge, Kathe walked on, following the direction of the stream, till she reached the old wooden bridge, across which lay Susanne’s drying-ground, and, just beyond again, the picturesque old house, standing on the borders of the

forest, with its irregular outline distinctly marked against the dark background of the foliage, and the river flowing almost close to the steps of the door.

It was a low, one-storied house, the roof rising like a thatched cottage from immediately above the windows, surmounted by a golden weather-cock and a massive row of chimney-pots, from one of which smoke was issuing in curling rings—a thing that had not been seen there for many a long year; for in the miller's time the house was used as a place in which to deposit fruit, and that only in one room. The window-shutters, from one year's end to the other, were never unfastened, till they must have adhered to the window-frames; and in the fruit season only once now and again the hall-

door was unlatched, in order to admit Susanne when she fetched the baskets of apples and pears needed for the regular weekly household supply. And then it was that Kathe, as a little girl, had crept in by her side, and filled her tiny apron with the luscious fruit, frightened, while she did so, at the darkness reigning around her.

To-day, for the first time, she saw glass shining in the deep window embrasures, one or two of which were partly open, and, moved by a curiosity stronger than she had any power or wish to resist, she crossed the old bridge and went straight up to the house.

Her heart beat fast, and her breath came and went quicker than usual; for she knew that the house belonged to Dr.

Bruck, and that she had no right to be wandering around it in this idle, curious way. But as soon as her feet had touched the soft grass plat, and her eyes had caught sight of the sparrows twittering on the roof, she seemed to forget every other sensation but delight and astonishment in the lively, inhabited appearance of the deserted old building.

She wandered round the sides and back of the place, peering into the rooms, looking now at a green table-cloth hung out of one window, and then at the shining cooking utensils visible through another, till she reached the west corner, and was about to continue along the front part of the house, when she started and stood still, with a hot flush of shame at her thoughtless behaviour covering her face

and reaching to the roots of her hair.

For at the hall-door, which divided the old-fashioned house into two parts, on the top of the steps which led down to a wide-spreading lawn, stood a lady—a refined, gentle-looking woman, whom Kathe intuitively guessed must be Dr. Bruck's aunt, the widowed mistress of the house. She was dusting a picture she held in her hand; and as Kathe drew near, she looked at the young girl with surprise depicted plainly on her face, and laid the frame on a table covered with books and pictures that stood on the door-step at her side.

She was a very different person to the bustling, stout, somewhat vulgar woman, who cared for nothing but house-cleaning

and cooking, she had imagined Dr. Bruck's aunt must be from Flora's sarcastic description of her.

Glancing at her gentle face, the timid girl hurried forward, and when she reached the lowest of the three steps, she stammered out, by way of apology for her appearance near the house—

“I played here as a child, and I have only returned from Dresden a few days—and—that is my sister.”

And she pointed to the picture the lady had just placed on the table, and then burst into a merry peal of laughter at her own awkward manner of introducing herself.

The lady smiled as if amused, and, moving down the steps, held out both hands, saying—

"Then you must be Dr. Bruck's youngest future sister-in-law." A shadow flitted over her face as she added rather bitterly: "I was not aware that there were visitors at the Villa."

It was now Kathe's turn for a shadow to cross over her bright laughing eyes: was she then such a mere cipher, such a mere member of the Mangold family in Dr. Bruck's estimation, that he had not thought it worth while to mention his interview with her at the Mill?

She bit her lips, and silently obeyed the lady's graceful invitation to enter the house, as, opening one of the side doors and entering the room with a dignity that charmed Kathe in spite of her momentary annoyance, she said in a friendly tone—

“This is my private room, and my home henceforth to the end :” adding with a smile—“ Perhaps you can hardly understand the feeling of perfect rest and contentment which this thought brings to me. I always lived in the country till my husband had a curacy given him in town, a year or two ere his death, and although he thought it best to accept the appointment, we both regretted leaving the little parsonage where we had spent our happiest years ; though our income was so small that with all our economy and care, it was often a difficult matter to meet our simple expenses. I dislike the dust and noise of town life, and the last few years I longed so much to return to the green fields and fresh air of the country, that my health began to fail ;

I said nothing of course to the Doctor ; and only a few days ago I discovered that he had spent his savings of years to satisfy this craving of mine, and bought this place. He brought me to see it in the afternoon of the day he purchased it, and never shall I forget the delight and surprise I felt when he told me that henceforth I was to live here." And her voice faltered with emotion as she turned her head aside to hide the tears in her eyes, while Kathe wondered to herself why, if she felt so deeply her nephew's kindness, she should speak of him as the " Doctor," and not call him by his name.

Presently the lady smiled again, and said in a confiding tone as if she had known her young visitor for years—

"It's a genuine little castle, isn't it? Look at those massive folding doors and that grand stucco work on the ceiling! and those old-fashioned leather hangings, with their blackened gold ornaments, must once have been very costly. And outside in the garden there are the remains of many valuable sandstone figures and other ornaments. I am convinced that this place was at one time the dower-house of the old Baumgarten family. I shall hunt up its history some day—but I have only had time as yet to arrange the rooms a little, and have the stoves warmed, for I fancy the walls are a little damp, otherwise the house is in perfect repair, not a window broken or a nail wanting."

While the elder lady thus chatted on, Kathe had been quietly observing the contents of the room. The dark well-worn mahogany furniture suited to perfection the rich faded leather hangings. Not far from the queer-shaped voluted china stove stood the roomy sofa covered with chintz, above which hung a portrait in pastilles of the late curate in his clerical robes. A group of exquisite plants, azaleas, cactus and gum trees, occupied the space on either side of the window, and the deep embrasure itself was filled in with sweet smelling hyacinths, delicate white narcissus and other spring flowers. On a small stand placed in the sunlight half-a-dozen gold and silver fish were swimming in a globe, above which hung an antiquated canary

cage, suspended by a chain from a hook in the ceiling. In a niche on one side of the room, ornamented with ivy, stood a work-basket with a low chair and stool in front of it.

"Those are my pet plants. I have cultivated them entirely myself," said the curate's widow, following her young visitor's surprised glance at the rich floral show in the window. "The best of them all, of course, I had placed in the Doctor's room," she added, opening the door leading into an adjoining apartment and bidding Kathe enter. This apartment was a corner-room, the best "of course" again the house afforded, with the windows opening to the south and west sides.

How quietly and gently she uttered

young girl's grave troubled face and remembered she had only returned to the Villa a few days since, an uneasy feeling she could not account for took possession of her, and made her involuntarily remark, after a moment's pause—

“The room is not quite finished yet. I have the large photograph of the Doctor's betrothed wife to hang up over there,” and she pointed to a space on the wall between the windows, “as also an oil-painting of his mother, my dear and only sister.”

Then she went on to say that she expected him to arrive in town by the evening train, that he had no idea that she had left her old apartments, but that wishing to give him a pleasant surprise

the beautiful object of his love, her faithless sister, was scheming night and day to find an honourable excuse in the eyes of the world to dash that illusion to the ground by withdrawing from her engagement. Did he but know it, the whisper, "Make him happy *yourself*," would have accomplished her end.

Did the warm-hearted, affectionate aunt, who stood near her while these thoughts coursed through her brain, instinctively feel that a terrible sorrow was hovering over the future of her much-loved nephew? She had received Kathe with all the confidence that her position as the youngest future sister-in-law of her nephew demanded; she had not thought it necessary to introduce herself as Dr. Bruck's aunt, but now, as she looked anxiously at the

young girl's grave troubled face and remembered she had only returned to the Villa a few days since, an uneasy feeling she could not account for took possession of her, and made her involuntarily remark, after a moment's pause—

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she had persuaded the kind Counsellor to allow her to obtain the keys of the new house that she might have all in readiness against her nephew's return.

During this explanation the elderly lady had moved gently to and fro about the room, putting the final touches to the curtains and ornaments, as quietly as if the Doctor himself were sitting at his table writing. Then, after dipping her hands in a basin of fresh water in the hall and wiping them on a clean white cloth, she went to a cupboard in the Doctor's room and taking out a plate of sweet cakes offered them smilingly to Kathe, saying—

“They are quite fresh. I found time to bake them this morning after my early cup of coffee, for the Doctor always likes

to have some by him to give to small troublesome patients. Wine I can't offer you—the few bottles I had by me I left in town—they belong to those patients who are seriously ill and need support.”

The tears sprang into Kathe's eyes as she thought of the “papers” in the new iron safe, which could “pour streams of gold to every quarter of the world,” of the well-filled wine-cellar in the Tower, which Henriette had told her contained “mountains of bottles, full of rich old wine,” and of her indolent sister lounging on the easy-chair smoking a cigarette of rare and fabulous value. Contrasting these things with the simple life, and habits, and speech of the kind-hearted lady before her, the young girl lost her timidity and reserve, and five minutes

later was relating to this apparent stranger the history of her short eighteen years, of her home and duties in Dresden, and the busy life led by her governess as the wife of a parish doctor in the town, who had taught her young pupil to follow her example, and to minister with her own hands, not only to the wants and needs of the poor around, but to every one else who had any claim on her affection or sympathy.

“But what does Madame Urach think of such an education for you?” asked the elderly lady, smiling a soft amused smile, as she glanced admiringly at the blooming young face by her side.

“I don’t know,” replied Kathe, shrugging her shoulders with a mischievous gleam in her eyes, “but I think she

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that expression, "of course!" To Kathe, young girl as she was, it was a simple revelation of the true womanly devotion and affection this childless widowed lady bestowed upon her nephew, in return for his care of and affection for her. From here could be seen the most beautiful scenery in the park and neighbourhood. In the distance, beyond the flowing river, the grey top of the Villa was just visible, so that as the young Doctor sat at his writing-table he had only to raise his eyes in order to catch a glimpse of the golden weather-cock which surmounted the house wherein dwelt the beautiful girl he hoped to make his wife. Kathe felt her cheeks burn with anger and indignation as she thought of the sweet illusion this man was indulging in, while

the beautiful object of his love, her faithless sister, was scheming night and day to find an honourable excuse in the eyes of the world to dash that illusion to the ground by withdrawing from her engagement. Did he but know it, the whisper, "Make him happy *yourself*," would have accomplished her end.

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considers my movements too impetuous, my voice too loud, and that on the whole I am too strong and healthy, and not pale enough. No one knows how my bright spirits distress her—they are not lady-like. Is that the portrait of your sister, Madame?" asked the girl, abruptly changing the conversation, and walking over to the side of the room where an oil-painting was placed against the wall.

"Yes. I shall be anxious about it till it is hung up in its place, for the frame is a little shaken, I fear; but I suffer from giddiness, and dare not venture to mount the steps to hang it up, so it must wait till the new maid arrives. I expect her this evening. I was obliged to leave the putting up of my bed-curtains for the same unfortunate reason."

In an instant Kathe's parasol and hat were laid on the table, and the nosegay of wild flowers she had gathered on the road unthinkingly placed in a crystal glass that stood by the writing materials. Giving the table a push into the middle of the room she took up the hammer and nails lying on the window-sill and said, coaxingly—

“Let me do it!”

“What a kind, useful little woman you are,” was the older lady's smiling assent to this unexpected proposal, as she pointed to a high narrow stool for Kathe to stand on.

In a very few moments the picture was in its place, and then the old lady handed her the photograph to hang up also, saying, as she gently removed a little dust from the glass—

"What a lovely face it is! I don't know her very well, I have seen her so seldom. Naturally I couldn't expect her to come and see an old woman like me very often, but she is very dear to me, since she loves the Doctor and means to make him happy."

Kathe shrank back for a moment. After all she had heard in the Tower not an hour ago, how could she deliberately place before the eyes of the deceived man, the portrait which no longer virtually belonged to him any more than the ring he wore on his finger? Both would soon have to be returned to the heartless girl who had played with her lover's feelings as a cat plays with a mouse, and yet Kathe dared not utter one word of the bitter truth. She felt so false

and so like a hypocrite by her silence, that she all but let the picture fall to the ground as she took it out of the old lady's hand. Hitting the nail with such force that it made the old wall shake, she hastily twisted the cord over it and sprang to the ground. Involuntarily glancing at her work as she replaced the table she fancied the beautiful mouth curled in a triumphant wicked smile of demoniacal delight.

Kathe snatched up her hat and parasol and turned to leave the room as quickly as possible. She had reached the threshold and was uttering a hasty farewell, when her eyes caught sight of an open door on her right, through which she could see the old lady's uncurtained bed with the steps beside it.

"I had forgotten that!" she exclaimed.

that expression, "of course!" To Kathe, young girl as she was, it was a simple revelation of the true womanly devotion and affection this childless widowed lady bestowed upon her nephew, in return for his care of and affection for her. From here could be seen the most beautiful scenery in the park and neighbourhood. In the distance, beyond the flowing river, the grey top of the Villa was just visible, so that as the young Doctor sat at his writing-table he had only to raise his eyes in order to catch a glimpse of the golden weather-cock which surmounted the house wherein dwelt the beautiful girl he hoped to make his wife. Kathe felt her cheeks burn with anger and indignation as she thought of the sweet illusion this man was indulging in, while

the beautiful object of his love, her faithless sister, was scheming night and day to find an honourable excuse in the eyes of the world to dash that illusion to the ground by withdrawing from her engagement. Did he but know it, the whisper, "Make him happy *yourself*," would have accomplished her end.

Did the warm-hearted, affectionate aunt, who stood near her while these thoughts coursed through her brain, instinctively feel that a terrible sorrow was hovering over the future of her much-loved nephew? She had received Kathe with all the confidence that her position as the youngest future sister-in-law of her nephew demanded; she had not thought it necessary to introduce herself as Dr. Bruck's aunt, but now, as she looked anxiously at the

young girl's grave troubled face and remembered she had only returned to the Villa a few days since, an uneasy feeling she could not account for took possession of her, and made her involuntarily remark, after a moment's pause—

“The room is not quite finished yet. I have the large photograph of the Doctor's betrothed wife to hang up over there,” and she pointed to a space on the wall between the windows, “as also an oil-painting of his mother, my dear and only sister.”

Then she went on to say that she expected him to arrive in town by the evening train, that he had no idea that she had left her old apartments, but that wishing to give him a pleasant surprise

she had persuaded the kind Counsellor to allow her to obtain the keys of the new house that she might have all in readiness against her nephew's return.

During this explanation the elderly lady had moved gently to and fro about the room, putting the final touches to the curtains and ornaments, as quietly as if the Doctor himself were sitting at his table writing. Then, after dipping her hands in a basin of fresh water in the hall and wiping them on a clean white cloth, she went to a cupboard in the Doctor's room and taking out a plate of sweet cakes offered them smilingly to Kathe, saying—

“ They are quite fresh. I found time to bake them this morning after my early cup of coffee, for the Doctor always likes

to have some by him to give to small troublesome patients. Wine I can't offer you—the few bottles I had by me I left in town—they belong to those patients who are seriously ill and need support.”

The tears sprang into Kathe's eyes as she thought of the “papers” in the new iron safe, which could “pour streams of gold to every quarter of the world,” of the well-filled wine-cellar in the Tower, which Henriette had told her contained “mountains of bottles, full of rich old wine,” and of her indolent sister lounging on the easy-chair smoking a cigarette of rare and fabulous value. Contrasting these things with the simple life, and habits, and speech of the kind-hearted lady before her, the young girl lost her timidity and reserve, and five minutes

later was relating to this apparent stranger the history of her short eighteen years, of her home and duties in Dresden, and the busy life led by her governess as the wife of a parish doctor in the town, who had taught her young pupil to follow her example, and to minister with her own hands, not only to the wants and needs of the poor around, but to every one else who had any claim on her affection or sympathy.

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In a very few moments the picture was in its place, and then the old lady handed her the photograph to hang up also, saying, as she gently removed a little dust from the glass—

“What lovely little wild flowers! How kind of you to remember how fond I am of these little blue spring flowers!”

An exclamation from the old lady made him start with surprise.

“It was not I, Leo, it was Kathe Mangold put them in the glass; she is here and I had forgotten all about her — my poor old head!” and she hurried from the room to find her guest and apologize to her for her forgetfulness.

But Kathe had gently closed the door ere she reached the hall, and was out of sight through the copse as quickly as possible.

Presently the young girl turned, and slowly walked back to the house. When she drew near the windows she saw a firm strong manly hand draw the hyacinth pots slightly apart and place between them

a crystal glass of blue forget-me-nots ; it was her nosegay that he had evidently removed from his own table and brought in there to the dining-room.

Kathe started and blushed, for in spite of her unnoticed escape from the house she had nevertheless placed herself in an awkward position. What would he be likely to think of her, a young girl, for placing a glass of his favourite flowers on his table in his private study ? Would he imagine she had gathered them on purpose ?”

Tears of vexation and annoyance rose to her eyes, but mastering her emotion she said as quietly as she could—

“Will you kindly hand me my flowers, Herr Doctor ? They belong to me ; I put them down for a moment on the

table and forgot them ;" and she raised her hands to receive the nosegay.

At first it seemed as if her unexpected voice had startled him, for he half knocked over one of the narcissus pots, but although it somewhat annoyed him to find that his action had been seen by Kathe, he replied pleasantly in a voice that assured her that he had not meant to reprove her by removing the flowers from his room.

" I will bring them out to you, Fräulein."

A moment later his flowing beard and broad shoulders appeared outside on the top of the steps, and he handed her the glass with a polite inclination of his handsome head. She took the flowers and said smiling—

" They are bright, brave little things to come out so quickly in the April sun, but

they need so much hunting after that when at last one has found a handful of them they ought to be prized higher than a basketful of hot-house flowers," and the young girl looked fearlessly up in the Doctor's face, feeling convinced that he would not *now* imagine she had left them on his table as a token of their new relationship.

Then the old lady put her head out of window and apologized for her forgetfulness of her guest in the joy of welcoming her dear nephew, adding an urgent and warm entreaty for Kathe to come and see her as often as she could.

"In a few weeks Fräulein Kathe returns to Dresden," replied the Doctor quickly.

"I may remain longer, Herr Doctor ;

perhaps I shall stay here a few months even," she answered, wondering if he feared that she had been talking to his aunt about his peculiar position with regard to Flora ; and longing to assure him that she respected his desire to keep his own affairs to himself, yet wondering again what this could have to do with her stay at the Villa. "Besides," she added after a pause, "as Henriette's physician, you will be the best judge of when she will be well enough for me to leave her and return to Dresden."

"Do you intend nursing Henriette?"

"Of course I do, and I think it a great shame that she has hitherto been nursed only by servants ; she has very bad nights, and she told me herself that she would rather pass them alone than have a sleepy

disagreeable person by her side in case she needs help. That must not occur again, I shall stay with her."

"You are taking upon yourself more than you imagine, Fräulein. Henriette is very ill, and will require long and patient nursing," he added, shading his eyes with his hand.

"I know that," replied Kathe gravely, her cheeks paling. "But I have courage ____"

"I don't doubt it for a moment, any more than I do your patience or your kindheartedness ; but it is not a question of conjecture as to time. I cannot possibly give my consent to your accepting the post of head nurse, physically you could not endure the fatigue."

"I ?" and the girl held up her arm

and looked proudly at its round plump appearance, as she smiled incredulously and said warmly, "Don't you think your fears on that score may be set at rest, Herr Doctor? I come of a good healthy family. I take after my grandmother, who was a peasant you know, or rather a woodman's daughter; she used to go about barefoot, and could handle an axe better than her brothers. Susanne told me that."

The young man looked up at the open window, and caught his old aunt regarding his companion with a strange look of admiration shining in her eyes. His own face immediately clouded.

"It's not a question of muscular strength," he said evasively; "as a rule it is not so necessary in a sick-room, and we must think of your nerves; however, it

is not for me to determine the point of your stay. That is Moriz's affair, he is your guardian and he will decide when it is best you should return to Dresden," and the last words were uttered in a more determined tone than was usual with the pleasant-spoken Doctor.

His aunt shrank back and looked at him questioningly, but Kathe stood quite still.

"Why are you so inflexible? Why do you seem so anxious that my guardian should be hard and unyielding on this subject?" the girl asked in her musical voice. "Are you afraid I shall do harm by staying; I don't think Moriz has power over me to keep me from nursing my sister if I choose. What do you say to her going with me to Dresden? There my

old friend will share the nursing with me, that won't hurt my nerves," and she smiled again.

"I will see what I can do," he replied.

"In that case I promise to fly away from here as fast and as soon as possible," replied Kathe with a grateful expression in her eyes which made him turn away his own and remain silent.

"Are you then so very anxious to be gone?" asked the old lady with a slight reproach ringing in the sound of her voice.

The young girl drew the gauze scarf which had fallen on her shoulders, and which she had worn instead of a hat, over her head, and tied it firmly under her chin ere she answered laughingly—

"Ought I to say 'no' for politeness,

sake, Madame ? I am afraid that as things are I shall be obliged to take my place in the world and conform to its capricious usages, but I have no intention of giving up my individual freedom of thought. I am as much a stranger to the grandmother of my half-sister now, as I was when dear papa made me kiss her hand as a little girl. She does not understand me at all, and I shrink away from her, and would like to hide myself in a corner as I did when a child. How cold the house seems !” and she shivered. “There is too much marble, it chills one’s feet. That is why Moriz has become such a formal stately man. Yes, dear Madame, I shall be delighted to return to Dresden as soon as possible—provided Henriette goes with me, for I love her dearly ; if she does

not," and the girl dropped the bantering tone she had adopted towards the old lady, "if she is not allowed to go—then I shall do my best to remain where I am, even to running the risk of obliging Moriz to use physical force for my removal to Dresden."

With a friendly nod to his aunt and a slight bow to the Doctor, she turned off on her road to visit old Susanne.



CHAPTER VIII.



HE factory clock had chimed out seven, yet Kathe was still sitting in the bow window at the Mill-house. She had yielded to Susanne's wish, and inspected the contents of the linen-press, had listened to the old woman's complaints that she was not yet strong enough to "look after things a bit," and to her grumblings about the inspector's wife, whom she did not trust implicitly, although she was a "good, kind soul." But

Kathe had not taken much interest to-day in all these things, and felt glad when Susanne had gone to bed and left her to herself in the dimly-lighted room.

With her hands lying idly in her lap, and her head resting against the back of her chair, the young girl gave herself up to thinking. She was in no hurry to leave the Mill; when the twilight hour was over, she would still have ample time to walk back to the Villa and change her dress before joining the family circle at eight.

This twilight hour, with its soft beauty and subdued hush, was an unknown pleasure at the Villa. There the moment the sun was down the shutters were closed, and the brilliant gas-chandeliers were lighted, and every shadow and half tint

driven mercilessly away out of sight. But in Dresden how sweetly this hour was prized by all the inmates of the house, when gentle words were spoken and kindly thoughts exchanged, which gave impetus and encouragement to each for the labours of the following day.

The monotonous swaying to and fro of the pendulum of the wooden clock in the corner of the big room was dull and heavy ; but it reminded the young girl of the evenings spent in the same room when she was a little child, and listened with delight and yet trembling to the fairy tales related by old Susanne as she sat spinning by the stove.

She glanced round the vast apartment, shrouded in the approaching darkness, and half shuddered as her eyes rested on the

spot where her grandfather had died ; and then she went on to think of the strange remark made by the Doctor when first she arrived, when she questioned him about the old man's death—unheeded by her as to its full meaning at the time, but now so well understood by the light of the knowledge that had come to her since.

Well, all the world might say to the contrary, but *she* could not and would not believe that such an earnest, truthful, upright man as she was convinced the Doctor was, would have risked the danger of performing an operation and hastening a man's death if he had not had firm faith in his own skill and experience, and the truest belief that the result of his skill would be satisfactory.

And the young girl's cheeks grew hot

with anger, and her heart felt heavy with sorrow, as she recalled Flora's bitter sneers against Dr. Bruck's medical knowledge when they were sitting in the luxuriously-furnished apartments in the Tower.

What a very strange woman this much-admired sister must be to cut and wound to the heart's core the man she was engaged to and had promised to marry in a very few weeks! And then Kathe's thoughts wandered off to all she had heard about this same lover whom Flora pretended to despise; how he had distinguished himself in the Franco-German war by his courage, and skill, and bold daring; how, on the return of his regiment to Berlin, he had been rewarded with a post of honour and distinction, which had brought him prominently into

notice as a man of mark and merit; and how, at the wish of his aunt, he had resigned this post and returned to M——. Here his brilliant services in the war, and the honours showered upon him in Berlin, had caused him to become a much-sought-after physician, and a very desirable match for the daughters of the neighbouring families.

Even the proud, ambitious Flora Mangold had considered it no condescension on her part to favour him with a promise of her hand. She had openly shown her preference for his society during the first few weeks of his return to M——; and when, a little later on, her engagement to the renowned young Doctor was publicly announced, she was congratulated by all her friends, and envied by all

the unmarried ladies belonging to their neighbourhood.

No wonder she shrank from personally breaking her engagement now that misfortune had overtaken her lover; she feared the world's verdict on such conduct if it came to be known that she had heartlessly flung him over at the first breath of slander touching his medical skill. So she preferred secretly torturing and wounding him, till her cold indifference and scornful manner should goad him into withdrawing from all claim to her hand.

Kathe sprang up from her seat, as the thought struck her that if she remained at the Villa for any length of time, she would have to witness the young Doctor's miserable awakening from his dream of Paradise. That he loved her sister Flora

devotedly and blindly, she was convinced ; also that he would struggle hard to win her for his wife before acknowledging his defeat.

Kathe clenched her hands with rage as she determined henceforth to support Moriz and Henriette, and oblige Flora to keep to her word, and not allow her to betray the man to whom she had plighted her troth.

“What a fool Flora must be to throw away so much happiness !” muttered the young girl, angrily. “If she had only seen him as I did to-day, so tender and gentle to his old aunt, she would——”

But Kathe checked herself, hastily pushed aside the stool at her feet, and sprang across the dark room into the hall, where a lamp burned brightly, and the

door of the work-room stood open, through which the burr of the mill-wheels and the hum of the machines could be plainly heard. The light and the noise combined to scare away the half-formed thought which had involuntarily crept into the young girl's brain and frightened her.

As she left the Mill-house and slowly walked down the stone steps, the evening air cooled her hot cheeks, and made her feel half ashamed of the manner in which she had spent the last hour in the corner room of the old Mill-house.

The stars were shining overhead, and it was quite dark when she reached the Villa. Peering through one of the windows where the shutters were not quite closed, she saw that the drawing-room was full of visitors. Then suddenly she remembered that this

was Madame Urach's reception night, and, hastily running round to a side entrance for fear of being seen in the hall, she rushed up to her own room to change her dress.

It was nearly half-past eight when Kathe entered one of the drawing-rooms, where Henriette sat at the tea-table, with a number of young ladies chatting and laughing about her.

"Come here, Kathe," exclaimed Henriette, as the young girl appeared; "the tea is cold I'm afraid, but you shall have some fresh made if you like."

"No thank you, dear," replied Kathe, looking anxiously at the pale drawn face of the invalid girl, whose eyes were shining feverishly, and whose emaciated angular figure looked almost grotesque, by reason

of the scarlet sleeveless jacket she wore over a bright blue silk dress. Her fair hair was adorned with ribbons of the same brilliant hue, and the little shoe peeping from under her skirts had attached to it a rosette of colour to match her jacket.

“Doctor Bruck has come back,” whispered Henriette, in a low, trembling voice, nodding her head towards the music-room, where some one was murdering a popular valse on a grand piano; “he is not there, but in Flora’s room beyond. Kathe, doesn’t he look as if he had grown taller since he went away?—Good gracious! Kathe, don’t put on that long face!” the girl went on excitedly. “Every one seems disagreeable to-night—Moriz is put out at the contents of a telegram he received an

hour ago, and grandma is as savage as she can be because her rooms are somewhat empty this evening. Bah!—and I, I am *so* happy, so very happy! Do you know, Kathe, I was afraid a couple of days ago, that Doctor Bruck would find me a corpse when he returned. No, no, I will *not* die, if he is not there by me.”

It was well that the false notes from the adjoining room crashed louder and louder, and that the old gentlemen by the stove raised their voices in warm dispute over some political question, for Henriette had spoken in a sharp, clear tone, that caused Madame Urach to raise her eyes and look reprovingly across at the tea-table. In an instant the girl recovered her usual calmness, and added quietly to Kathe, as she shrugged her shoulders and glanced round

the room, "No one dies willingly alone ; and if the doctor is standing by, well ! one always fancies up to the last moment, I suppose, that one will recover—won't you drink this, Kathe ?"

"I can't," was all the answer Kathe could utter. She knew now quite well that Henriette would never go to Dresden, and with nervous trembling fingers she pulled a piece of embroidery out of her pocket, and tried to make it appear to those around that she meant to work.

"Nonsense !" exclaimed Henriette impatiently. "Do you imagine I am going to sit here and watch you drag your needle in and out that bit of embroidery ? Come, let us go to the music-room ! Margaret von Grise will destroy our nerves as well as the instrument, unless we put an end to

that noise ;” and she wound her thin arms round Kathe’s waist, and drew her into the adjoining apartment.

The wide folding-doors between this room and Flora’s private sanctum beyond were thrown open to-night, as was usually the case on Madame Urach’s reception evenings. Flora was standing idly by the table, her brother-in-law lounging in a fauteuil, and Doctor Bruck turning over the leaves of a book, when the two girls appeared on the threshold. The Doctor looked pale in spite of the subdued soft light from the lamp, which was not half so bright as the gas in the adjoining salons, and his face was overshadowed by an earnest grave expression about the brow and mouth, which betokened a spirit ill at ease within ; but in spite of his gravity he

looked remarkably young by the side of his handsome betrothed bride.

Seeing the lovers were not alone, Henriette walked unconcernedly into the room, but Kathe stood hesitating on the threshold. Flora's forbidding countenance awed her. She noticed, by a glance at the lovely face before her, that her sister was not in a pleasant humour, and was about to return to the music-room, when Flora said, without changing her position at the table, "Come here, child !" then as her eye caught sight of the grey silk dress, which Kathe had exchanged for the usual heavy mourning she wore, she added, "Always that stiff silk which makes you look like the paper figure of an angel, and is enough to try the nerves of the strongest with its constant rustling and crackling. For goodness' sake

tell us why you always wear such thick heavy material, which must be as fit for your simple domestic life in Dresden as——”

“It’s a weakness of mine,” interrupted Kathe, with an unruffled smile, “I dare say you will think it very childish, but I love to hear silk rustling about me, it sounds so grand. Of course I don’t wear it in my busy or domestic hours in Dresden; you know that well, Flora.”

“Only hear how proudly she emphasizes the word ‘domestic!’ You little goose—I should like to see you just once in your linen apron giving out the stores. Ah, well! Every one has his or her hobby! To be domestic—is not mine,” and she looked slowly into the young Doctor’s face, who closed his book, and laid it on the table.

“What nonsense, Flora!” cried Henriette, in her shrill, mocking voice; “a few months ago you were often enough over at the soup kitchen, as interested as any one in making the soup, or pretending to be—any way, the dainty linen apron and your wonderful exertions became you perfectly,—ha, ha!” Flora bit her lip.

“As usual, you are exaggerating, and this time you have represented that fancy of mine as an earnest act, whereas it was only a passing caprice,” replied Flora, as she slowly began pacing to and fro on the floor, fully aware that the white alpaca folds of her dress showed off to advantage the supple grace of her figure.

The Counsellor sprang up.

“Will it please you to come into the other room now?” he asked. “There are

very few people here to-night, and no wonder—there is a soirée at the Duke's this evening," he added, as if to reassure himself. "But unless we make up our minds to a day or two's bad humour from grandmamma, we had better go and make ourselves agreeable. Come, Flora."

"I have excused myself for half-an-hour, Moriz," she replied, with impatience. "My article must be finished to-night, and it would have been done already if Dr. Bruck had not, unfortunately, detained me."

"Is there so much hurry needed? Why, may I ask?" spoke the Doctor, drawing near the writing-table with his eyes brimful of fun.

"Why? Because I gave my word it should be done to-night," she answered sharply. "Ah, it amuses you I see. I

suppose, as it is only a *woman's* work, you are wondering who in all the world is waiting for such a trifle?"

"In general, I *don't* think so lightly of woman's work—"

"In general?" she repeated with a hard laugh. "Ah, yes, to be sure, in general woman's work consists in cooking, sewing, knitting—"

"Why don't you allow me to finish, Flora?" he went on, patiently. "I was referring to woman's moral influence as well as to the work of her hands. I have not gone very much into the question of women's rights, but I maintain that she is capable of being a true help-meet and assistant to man in all his undertakings, be the undertakings of what nature they may."

"Assistant? How condescending! My dear friend, we women want more than that. We claim *equality*, and freedom to pursue whatever aim or purpose we may have in view."

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders with a deprecating air as he answered in a slightly sarcastic tone—

"That is the highest and wildest power modern advancement can claim, but one which will be disputed by all those who have no wish to see women placed in a false position. It would be like putting a sharp knife into a small careless hand."

Flora did not reply, but her face had become very white. She pointedly took up a steel pen lying on the table, tried its nib on her thumbnail, and stuck it in a pen-holder; then she drew towards her a small

ebony case, and with a rash but trembling hand opened it and drew forth a cigarette. Henriette snatched her hand from Kathe's arm and stepped forwards as if to remonstrate with her wilful elder sister. The Counsellor walked hastily across the room, as the small tapering fingers opened a sharp knife, and, with a defiant glance over her shoulder at the Doctor, Flora snipped off the end bit, saying—

“The knife to be used for this purpose, eh? But there is one thing that our poor woman's brain shares in common with you men, and that is, that we can think and work far better when we—smoke,” and she struck a match and lit the cigarette.

“*You* smoking, Flora? why, I thought a cigar always made you feel ill!” exclaimed Margaret Grise, entering just at this

moment and clapping her hands together.

"Flora is only doing it for fun," remarked Doctor Bruck, quietly nearing the table where his betrothed was standing. "This first attempt will be enough for her, a second would be injurious to her health."

"Will you dare forbid it, Leo?" asked Flora in an icy tone, but with flashing eyes, as for a moment she took the cigarette from her lips and held it daintily between her fingers.

Without any haste, and in a gentle but firm manner, the young man took the obnoxious weed from her hand and threw it among the ashes of the stove.

"I have no right as *yet* to forbid it. I might beg you not to do it, but I have no liking for useless requests. You know very

well I hate to see smoke issuing from a woman's lips. In my capacity as physician I absolutely forbid you to smoke. I have told you before your lungs are not too strong."

At first Flora looked at her lover in speechless astonishment at his boldness, but when he made reference to her lungs she shuddered slightly, but quickly rallying she said with a mocking laugh—

"That is a very far-fetched diagnosis. Besides, that horrid old Court physician, who has known me since my childhood, has never hinted at such a thing. You try to frighten me as if I were a baby. Bah! Life is not such a delightful thing to me that I care to give up one pleasure to prolong it. On the contrary, I mean to continue to smoke—it is necessary for me in

my literary vocation, and this vocation is my only happiness—for it I live and breathe—”

“Till you arrive at the inevitable turning-point to which your vocation is leading,” broke in the Doctor in a severe tone.

An angry flush passed over her brow. She opened her lips to make a bitter retort, but noticing Fräulein Grise's presence in the room she wisely refrained. Having no desire that this scandal-loving young lady with the sharp face and angular shoulders should repeat at the Court, where she was one of the dames d'honneur, the disagreeable fact that the proud Flora Mangold had stooped to quarrel with her lover, she forced her lips to smile, and in her usual graceful manner answered, languidly—

“What nonsense, Leo! You are prosy

to-night. You have just returned from a pleasure-trip, did you amuse your—”

She became suddenly silent, for the Doctor had seized her left hand and held it in a vice.

“Will you have the kindness not to make fun of *my* vocation, Flora?” he said, laying a stress on each word.

“I was speaking of pleasure,” she answered flippantly, snatching her hand angrily away.

It was never an agreeable sight to Kathe when Madame Urach's unsympathetic face appeared unexpectedly in her vicinity, but just now she felt a positive relief when she saw the old lady suddenly enter the room. Her countenance bore traces of vexation and annoyance, and her whole figure shook with suppressed anger as she said—

“ I shall be obliged to have my whist-table brought in here, if my guests are to be neglected in this way. Henriette, what made you leave the tea-table so soon? I shall have to place my maid there ; *she* will not desert her post before her duty is finished. And as to you, Flora, I am surprised to find you at your writing-table when you know our friends are here. And if your publisher hurries you so much that you are obliged to work in the evening, then be good enough to close your door unless you wish us to understand that the whole thing is only done from ostentation and a love of appearing learned.”

The old lady must have been very irate, indeed, to speak thus before one of the ladies of the Court.

Flora opened her papers and arranged her pens.

"You may think as you please, grand-mamma!" she said coldly. "I cannot help it if others come and disturb me; but for the interruption I should have been making a sacrifice of myself at the present moment, and be sitting at one of your green tables."

Henriette slipped unnoticed past her grandmother, and winking to Kathe to follow, whispered as they left the room—

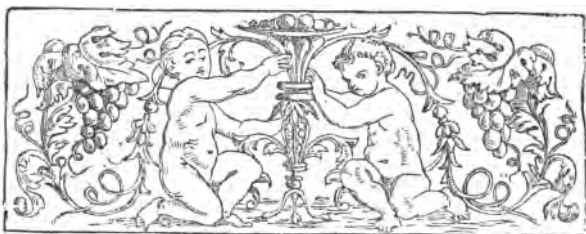
"These scenes are killing me fast."

"Have patience! Flora will have to give way; he will force her to obey him yet," replied Kathe, strongly excited. "But I can't understand *him*. Were I in his place—" she did not finish, but drew herself up proudly as her eyes flashed scornfully.

"But you don't understand the force of

love, Kathe. I can see by your cool looks and blooming face that you have not yet tasted of the poisonous cup." Then after a moment's pause to regain her breath, she went on slowly and thoughtfully.

"You have no idea how fascinating and charming Flora can be if she chooses. You have only seen her since she has been playing this detestably mean rôle. I can quite understand that the man whom she once convinced she loved, would die sooner than give her up."



CHAPTER IX.

ENRIETTE went back to her place at the tea-urn, but Kathe remained standing by the piano in the music-room thinking over what she had just heard. Could it be possible that a man would die rather than give up a girl who scorned his love? And was Dr. Bruck a man likely to commit such a folly?

She could not help noticing him closely as he passed through the room with

Madame Urach, and stopped to exchange a few words with a newly-arrived guest. His manner was quiet and courteous as usual, but Kathe had seen his eyes flash with anger once or twice while he was talking to Flora, and even now there was a disturbed troubled look about his brow which denoted a more restless spirit within than appeared outwardly.

Five minutes later Flora pushed back her stool with an impatient sigh, and stood on the threshold of the door between the two rooms.

"Have you finished already?" asked Fräulein von Grise running her fingers over the keys of the piano.

"How absurd to imagine any such thing! Do you fancy ideas can be struck off at that rate? The fact is I am tired—

and I never can work unless the spirit is on me—I love it too well.”

Fräulein von Grise smiled a wicked smile as she remarked—

“I am getting very impatient to see what the critics say to your work on ‘Woman.’ You have told us so much about it that I am dying to see it in print. Has the publisher accepted it?”

Flora caught the wicked smile and replied—

“You would be highly delighted if it were a failure, wouldn’t you, Margaret? Well, it won’t be, as I know from my—my little finger.” She smiled softly, shook her head, and advanced towards the drawing-room with the mien and air of a princess.

“What are you looking at that music for, Kathe? Can it be possible you want

us to hear you play also?" she asked, standing still by her sister and glancing with a meaning expression towards the young lady at the piano. "Do you sing? If so, you must inherit the gift from the Somers'; none of *our* family have any musical talent."

Kathe shook her head.

"At all events, Kathe, you must play," said the Counsellor, coming forward from a recess where he had been conversing with a friend. "I know you do, from the bills for your lessons. Frightfully dear ones too, as I have often meant to tell you."

The young girl laughed.

"They were the best, Moriz. In Dresden, people are very practical, and know that the best are the cheapest in the end."

“All right, my dear. But have you any taste for music?” he asked doubtfully. “Flora says truly the Mangolds are not musical.”

“I am fond of it,” she answered simply.

“But have you any talent for it?”

“I can compose a melody sometimes,” she replied blushing.

Flora turned back suddenly to her sister's side, saying hastily—

“Compose melodies! What nonsense you talk, with your rosy cheeks and fondness for housewifery. A polka, perhaps, if you dance with spirit——”

“I delight in dancing, Flora,” broke in Kathe with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

“Ah! But you ought not to confound that kind of music with higher works; it would require a profound study of thorough

bass. I don't suppose you have learnt that?" she added with a slight sneer.

"The last three years I have."

Flora clasped her hands together in despair.

"Your Lucas," so she always spoke of the lady who had educated Kathe—"Your Lucas must be mad to waste money like that."

No one spoke in answer to this remark, every word of which must have been heard in the adjoining room where Dr. Bruck sat silently by the side of Henriette, glancing now and again at the group by the piano.

Henriette moved quickly from her seat, and hurrying into the music-room said in her shrill clear voice—

"You are fond of music, Kathe, and you

have not once touched the piano since you have been here ?”

“The instrument stands close to Flora’s room, how could I have found the courage to disturb her at her work ?” replied the young girl simply. “I have over and over again longed to play on this piano, it has such a glorious tone, and mine in Dresden is not good for much. We bought it second-hand five years ago. My dear old friend often spoke of asking you to give me a new one, Moriz,” she added, addressing her guardian ; “but I dissuaded her from making the request, I was so afraid you might refuse. But since you showed me that new iron safe to-day I have lost my shyness, and certainly should like to have a piano like this one.”

“That one cost a thousand thalers—a

thousand thalers is a great deal to give for a girl's passing fancy. I must think it over first."

"Who plays on your instrument?" asked Kathe with trembling voice and glowing eyes. "Who ever touches it in private life? It is only there for the use of your guests, Moriz. Must money never be spent unless for show?"

The Counsellor drew near and took hold of her hand; he had no idea the girl possessed so much energy and decision of character.

"Don't excite yourself, child," he said soothingly; "am I such a very hard and grim guardian? Go and play to us—and let us hear if you really *do* care for music; prove this and you shall have a piano to your own taste."

"After that I don't care to play," she replied, quietly drawing away her hand. "I could not perform to gain a piano—for how can I tell what *you* consider 'real love for music.' However, I will fetch my notes and let you hear me; I hate to be asked twice."

She turned to leave the room.

"Why fetch notes? Let us hear one of your own composition," remarked Flora, scornfully.

"Even that I can't do by heart," answered Kathe, closing the door.

She soon returned with a music-case in her hand. While she seated herself at the instrument, Flora opened the case, and taking out a piece of music cast her eyes over the title-page and asked—

"Who is it by?"

"Didn't you wish to hear one of my own compositions?"

"Yes, of course: but this piece is printed."

"Certainly, it is printed."

"Why, how did that happen?" exclaimed Flora in undisguised astonishment.

"How does *your* work happen to be printed?" retorted Kathe laughing, looking up gaily in her sister's face. Then seeing the cloud of displeasure that spread over Flora's countenance, she hastened to add with a proud smile: "My master had the 'Phantasie' printed, to give me a birthday pleasure."

"Aha! of course that explains it," said Flora, laying the piece down on the piano.

Henriette went close behind her young sister, and leaning over her shoulder when she had arranged the piece on the stand before her, pointed to the title-page, and said distinctly—

“Don’t you be imposed on, Flora! Look here: there stands the celebrated publisher’s name, Schött & Son; they don’t publish music to give a girl a birthday pleasure. Kathe, tell us the truth—your things are sold, and played by the public?”

Kathe nodded and blushed.

“But what I said just now is true. I had no idea my work was being printed till I saw a copy of it on my birthday-table,” she said, and began to play.

It was a very simple melody which presently fell in soft sweet tones on the

ears of the whist-players, forcing them to involuntarily lay down their cards and listen. Those in the music-room gazed in wonder and astonishment at the girl sitting so quietly on the stool at the instrument, that the jet ornament on her bosom barely moved as she breathed. There was no brilliant display of execution, no crashing and noise, no jumbling together of notes ; no one asked himself if the style were correct, but as the exquisite melody went on, now moving the heart to tears with its pathos and subdued sweetness, anon stirring the pulse to excitement with the growing wildness and grandeur of its own intensity, every one felt unconsciously lifted as it were out of himself, till in one long wail of sweet-sounding chords the melody finally died away. Then for several

minutes a profound silence reigned in the room, in fear that the retreating spirit of the melody might be startled by a whisper. The first to recover her powers of speech was Fräulein von Grise, who said patronizingly—

“The Princess ought to hear your charming ‘Phantasie,’ Fräulein ; if you will lend it me, I will play it to her.”

“And you shall have the best piano-forte that money can buy, Kathe,” said the Counsellor, her guardian, looking towards his ward with an air of glowing satisfaction and delight visible on his handsome countenance.

When the gentlemen had thanked her, and the elderly ladies had expressed aloud their regret that “her dear father was not alive to hear such beautiful music from

his youngest born," Henriette laid her pale sharp face caressingly against Kathe's burning cheeks and whispered with the tears in her eyes—

"You dear darling, how proud I am of you!"

Flora was the only one who had not spoken; when first the beautiful melody began, she had noiselessly returned to her own room, and softly paced the floor till it was finished, every now and then when some tone of richer sweetness fell on her ear, glancing through the door in startled wonder at the young girl sitting at the piano. When Kathe rose from her seat Flora disappeared into the shadow of the deep window recess.

"I fancy Flora is vexed that she is no longer the only celebrity in the Mangold

family; she has gone away to hide her—her mortification,” remarked Fräulein von Grise, in a loud whisper half to herself, half to the Counsellor.

The Counsellor smiled; he always did smile if any one from the Court favoured him with a confidential remark, but he did not answer. Turning to Kathe he said in an injured tone—

“I am very angry with your ‘dear Lucas,’ as Flora calls Madame Lucas, that she never gave me a hint of your wonderful musical talents.”

Kathe smiled, and answered after a moment—

“At home in Dresden no one thought of praising it to outsiders. Why should they? Madame Lucas is a woman who would never make a boast respecting

her own pupil, and she knows I have to learn a great deal more yet."

"But I look upon such reticence as Spartan-like in its——"

"Perhaps the most studied mode of securing a startling scene that could possibly be devised," broke in Flora from the threshold of her door, adding, with a bitter ring in her musical voice, "You can't impose on me, Kathe, and make me believe you have a poor opinion of your own gift, or that you are not aware of its importance. I think it was very false and mean of you to be here in the house for ten days and more, and pretend you did not know a note; it was not fair to me—to any of us."

"Is that your opinion, Flora?" cried Henriette, angrily. "You say that because you yourself are always talking of

what you are doing—always making a fuss about the hours you spend in writing and trying to make your friends believe in the results which never come, and——”

“Henriette, I should like a cup of tea,” called out Madame Urach, to put an end if possible to the angry altercation.

Henriette instantly obeyed the behest.

“You are mistaken, Flora, if you think I am not glad that I have talent for music,” said Kathe, gently, trying not to further irritate by her tone of voice her proud half-sister, who was gazing at Henriette’s retreating figure with glaring eyes and curling lip. “I am, very glad, and it would be ungrateful of me not to acknowledge it, it gives me so much pleasure. I ought to have spoken about it directly I came, especially as the reason I arrived a month

sooner than you expected me was simply because my harmony master was obliged to leave Dresden some weeks before the long holidays commenced ; and as I would like to be back when he returns home, I hurried off here directly he had gone."

At this moment Fräulein von Grise was obliged to quit the room to speak with her father, who had just arrived and asked for his daughter. The Counsellor followed her, to pay his respects to the old colonel.

When they were alone, Flora went over to the piano, took up the piece of music Kathe had been playing, and examined the title-page. Kathe noticed that her hand trembled, that her bosom heaved, and that she seemed very nervous, as she pointed to the coloured page, and asked—

"I suppose you have been greatly complimented on this?"

"By whom?" returned Kathe. "My master is as reticent with his praise as Madame Lucas, and no one else knows it is by me. You see the composer's name is not there."

"I conclude the thing sells well?"

Kathe was silent.

"Speak out the truth. Has more than one edition appeared?"

"Well—yes."

Flora flung the piece on the piano.

"That renown and fame should come to a fat, apple-cheeked girl in her teens, while others struggle and fight for it for years—often even die before they are known—is hard!" she said bitterly, as she began again to pace the floor. "But what does

it matter in reality?" she said, suddenly standing still, and her face brightening. "The most brilliant rocket leaves no trace in the air after its explosion—a few bright sparks and it is finished and done with; while the hidden fire in Vesuvius is growing hotter and hotter. The world knows the fire is there, and when flames burst forth at last, then it is that men's hearts tremble and shake. Very well, so it is. *Two* of our family have stepped forth now into the arena of publicity. We will wait and see, Kathe, which of us two will succeed best."

"Certainly not I," exclaimed Kathe, merrily, pushing back a stray curl from her brow. "I have no wish or desire to enter such an arena. Not that I am insensible to the delights of success; I can

imagine nothing more enjoyable than the power of moving others' hearts at will by the sheer force of one's own talents—*that* I would not give up for all the world—but to live *for* and *only* fame? No, no; there is far too much happiness to be gained without it in private life. What would be the use of fame to me, if it left me alone?"

"Ha, ha! that's the secret of your homely bringing-up, the quintessence of your education! As your Lucas did, so will you—you intend to marry."

Flora laughed a mocking, hollow laugh, that added spite to her remark.

Henriette blushed to the roots of her hair; even her throat partook of the same crimson hue, as she replied indignantly, in a low voice—

"You sneer at marriage as though you

had never thought of marrying yourself—yet——”

Flora stretched out her hand to check the coming words.

“Not a syllable more, please,” she said, entreatingly. Then, as she laid her hand across her bosom and shook her head, she went on, “Yes, my dear, I was foolish and blind enough once to be caught in the net ; but, thank God, my head is not entangled in its meshes, and will be able to give me back my freedom.”

“Have you any conscience at all, Flora ?”

“A very sensitive one, my dear, which reproaches me again and again for allowing myself to be caught as I was. I suppose you have read your Bible enough to know that we shall each have to answer for the

use we make of our talent. Look at me, Kathe, and then say if you really believe I am likely to pass my life as the wife of a simple doctor, poring over the soup-kettle and knitting stockings from morning till night? And for *him* too?"

She moved her head in the direction of the tea-room, where Dr. Bruck sat all alone at the table, with a journal in his hand, evidently so occupied with his own thoughts that he had not even noticed Henriette's departure from her post at the tea-urn. Groups of ladies and gentlemen were scattered through the handsomely-furnished rooms, chatting and laughing to each other; only the young Doctor sat apart and alone.

"Do you see, not one of the gentlemen take any notice of him," said Flora, lower-

ing her voice. "They avoid him, and rightly too. He has deceived both me and the world. The brilliant reputation he made was a mere sham!"

With which remark she retired to her own study, to avoid meeting Colonel von Grise, who was coming towards the music-room, accompanied by his daughter and the Counsellor.

After a formal introduction to Kathe, and a few complimentary speeches on her charming musical talent, the old gentleman begged the young girl to favour him with a little more music.

Simply and willingly Kathe obeyed his request immediately, this time choosing one of Chopin's exquisite productions in preference to anything of her own.

As she raised her eyes from her notes

at its conclusion, she was rather startled at the earnest, passionate expression of her guardian's face as he gazed at her. Never before had she noticed him looking at her like that. It was not the same kind, affectionate look with which he had given her bonbons as a child, or the bouquet he had brought with him from town only yesterday.

When she rose from the piano, he took one of her hands in his, and passed his arm around her waist.

"What has come over you, Kathe?" he whispered, with an earnestness of tone she had never heard before when he addressed her. "You remind me strangely of Clotilda; but you are more lovely and more gifted!"

She put her hand to her side to remove

his arm ; but he seized that hand also, and held it in a vice as if he would never willingly let it go again.

To the friends loitering around, it was a very simple action that the guardian should thus caress his ward in token of his delight at the display of her musical powers ; but Kathe did not like it, and passively submitted simply because the look and action together had half frightened her.

Henriette's pale cheeks coloured deeply ; she smiled a contented, peculiar smile, and did not answer as Dr. Bruck rose silently, shook hands with her, and disappeared from the room, while every one else was occupied with Kathe and her wonderful playing.

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